

Escape and  
Liberation  
1940—1945

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# Escape and Liberation

1940 — 1945

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## Preface

THE few stories of escapes and evasions which have been collected here must be looked upon simply as illustrations of some of the difficulties and problems with which the prisoners in this war have been faced. The stories cover but a very small part of the ground, and have been taken almost at random out of many hundreds of such adventures.

In the first chapter an attempt has been made to compare the conditions and problems experienced by prisoners in the 1940 war with those met by prisoners thirty years ago.

Of the men whose stories are told, many are dead. Barclay, Fowler, Pipkin, Rennie, Treacy, and Von Werra are all dead. It is a terrible loss of magnificent young men.

With the exception of Von Werra's adventure, these stories were told me by the men themselves, some immediately after their return to England—that is to say, several years ago, and no record exists of many of the details except in my memory.

It is unlikely that the deeds of these escapers who are dead can ever be told more fully than they have been told here. If then some minor errors have crept in, I must ask the indulgence of my readers, but assure them that to the best of my knowledge I have told the truth and only the truth as each man told it to me. With regard to evasion (a return from enemy occupied territory without having been a prisoner of war), it is obvious that the R.A.F. had by far the best opportunities for this type of escape.

Rennie, Barclay, Pipkin, Gay, and the three soldiers of the 51st were all evaders.

With regard to escaping, the available space in this book has been almost equally divided between escapers of the Army and the R.A.F. I regret that I have insufficient knowledge to include any escapers from the Navy, though I know that one Naval officer travelled successfully from his prison camp to the frontier, dressed in his own uniform, but with forged papers of a Bulgarian Naval officer. With real humour, which for fear of a libel action I hesitate to call typical, he signed these papers with the name—I. Buggeroff, and arrived safely at his destination. It is, however, entirely against the spirit which animates all prisoners in their desire for liberty that there should be any rivalry in this matter of escaping between the Services. A young man taken prisoner by the enemy, from whatever Service he may come, is faced, as a prisoner, with the same basic problems, and all the comparisons are invidious.

Part II is simply a description of my own experiences during the last few days of the war when I was fortunate enough to be present at the liberation of a few prisoner-of-war camps, both in our zone and in the Russian zone.

It would be very wrong to imagine that as a result with my contacts with the Russians I have anything but the highest respect both for Russian efficiency and for their friendly co-operation, in spite of the incidents sometimes amusing and sometimes rather frightening, which under the circumstances quite naturally occurred. It is in truth, very remarkable how unsuspecting and how friendly the Russians were on all occasions. Travelling through the Russian zone was not officially permitted, yet time after time after the mildest examination, we were treated with great courtesy and were allowed to proceed with every expression of friendship and goodwill.

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# Escape and Liberation

## Part One



## I

### Escape in Two Wars

THOSE who have reached a certain age can now look back on the conditions in which British prisoners of war existed in Germany in the two wars and make some rough comparison of the difficulties and problems which faced those who attempted to escape. It may be said at once that although a far higher percentage of the prisoners of War II tried, and kept on trying to regain their liberty, yet the numbers who succeeded in escaping from Germany were considerably less than in War I. The cause of this is not far to seek and is certainly not due to lack of skill or enterprise among the prisoners. It was due firstly to the vigorous control by the Gestapo in War II and secondly to the fact that escaping had "grown up."

In this war, both the prisoners and their guards had far greater knowledge than in War I and much of the knowledge was gained from the numerous escaping books which were published between the two wars. Some of these books were translated into German and Italian and even became compulsory reading for the camp commandants and prison guards in those countries.

If anyone, fearing a future war, is doubtful of the wisdom of publishing such a book as this, he may be assured there is no escaping knowledge to be found here which is not already common property. In the books on escaping written after War I, little was left untold so that the prison guards were, from the start, fully aware of nearly every trick that had been used in former days. The prisoners also read the books, for frequently copies of some of these old escaping stories found their way under various guises into the camps. It is probably true, how-



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ever, that the guards gained more from these books than the prisoners, for the possible tricks which a prisoner can play, the disguises which he can adopt and the bluffs which can be attempted, are strictly limited by the conditions in which he lives ; these conditions are controlled to a large extent by his guards.

Given time and the necessary knowledge, the Germans (as we all know) are capable of working out schemes for dealing with most eventualities. They judged, quite rightly, that the barracks, forts, disused factories or other large buildings employed as prisoner-of-war camps in the 1914 War, were by no means the best type of prison from a security point of view. They offered too many opportunities for ingenuity, and depended for their efficacy too much on locks, keys, and stone walls. All these obstacles had been shown by long experience to be relatively ineffective as preventatives to a determined escaper. Furthermore each new type of camp presented a fresh problem for the guards and new opportunities for the prisoners. In the 1914 war it was a fact, well-known to prisoners, that to get out of a newly-formed camp was relatively easy. The prisoners themselves, studying the problem from the inside, were by far the best discoverers of weak spots in the defences, and it was not until the prisoners had exploited these weaknesses that the Germans were able to block the easiest exits one by one. But the process took time ; the prisoners became more skilful and escaping knowledge accumulated, so that escaping never ceased—in fact, it increased very much towards the end of the Great War. From the German's point of view, the obvious answer was to simplify the problem and as far as possible to confine all prisoners to one type of camp, so that the lessons and experiences learnt in each camp could be made common property. It is hard to imagine a type of camp more suitable for the purpose than the one they selected for standard use. The prisoners were housed in long wooden barracks of a type very similar to those used

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by the military authorities in England. These barracks were surrounded by a double fence of barbed wire, the fences being from nine to twelve feet high. In between the fences (which were about six or seven feet apart) quantities of roly-poly barbed wire presented a most formidable obstacle. No prisoner could contemplate with equanimity the possibility of being hitched up on this barbed wire and thus presenting a legitimate target for any bloody-minded German sentry. At night the wire perimeter of such a camp was brilliantly flood-lit from pylons outside and at intervals along the fence fourteen-foot-high towers were erected. On each tower was a machine gun and a small searchlight. Thus it was fairly easy to ensure that there were no blind spots. Such a system of defence, though extremely good, was not absolutely impregnable. On at least two occasions prisoners escaped over the wires by making use of the floor of the tower to obscure the sentry's view—an almost incredible performance, taking into consideration the disheartening noise a wire fence makes if you try to climb it. On another occasion one of the most successful escapes of the whole war was made by first short-circuiting the electric system and then storming the wire in the dark with scaling ladders.

With rare exceptions then, prisoners discarded the idea of escaping over or through the double wire of the main defences and resorted to tunnelling, bluff, and change of identity. To take the last of these three first. It sometimes happened that officers of all services and still more frequently sergeants of the R.A.F. were able to get into touch with the large camps for "other ranks" of the Army. From these big camps working parties were sent out daily into the fields or factories. Many an escape started by an officer or sergeant changing his identity with a private soldier. But even working parties were well guarded (far better than they were in the last war), and often months of preparation and waiting were necessary before an opportunity arose. Nor was it easy

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to obtain the information and equipment needed, such as papers, food and civilian clothes, in a men's camp. At first the Germans allowed the R.A.F. sergeants to work in the fields outside their camps. The sergeants volunteered to work, but did so little and were such an unmitigated nuisance that the Germans, at a very early date, vetoed these working parties and guarded R.A.F. sergeants nearly as closely as they guarded the officers. Tunnelling has always seemed to me to be a poor way of getting out of a camp. The few tunnels that succeeded (such as the Holzminden tunnel in the last war) have become famous—and rightly so—for the difficulties are enormous. The disposal of earth is a terrible problem all on its own and was particularly difficult to solve in the new standard camps in Germany. In Luft 1 the prisoner of wars overcame it at first by making holes in their trouser-pockets, filling the pockets with earth and walking round the compound gently shaking themselves. In due course a thin deposit of fresh earth was noticed by observant Germans, and all sentries were instructed to walk about with their heads down, looking for further indications of tunnels. But tunnels are vulnerable in so many ways. To make a long tunnel requires an elaborate organisation, many workers, and months of work. The opening and closing of the mouth of a tunnel is a perpetual anxiety, and, as the tunnel lengthens, the problem of supplying the worker at the face with fresh air is a civil engineering problem of great difficulty. Most tunnels are betrayed—sometimes by traitors, but more often by indiscretion among the workers; for not everyone is capable of unceasing caution for months on end. The amount of labour devoted to tunnels in this war is really astounding, but relatively few have been successful. It must not be thought, however, that even unsuccessful tunnels are waste of time. On the contrary, the planning and organisation of a tunnel from a prison camp is an occupation so absorbing that no prisoner taking part in such an effort will suffer from that type of

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melancholia known to prisoners as "barbed wire disease."

If prisoners are to retain their sanity, it is necessary for them to have an outlet for their mental and physical energies and, if to this is added an element of danger and a large prize for success, so much the better. Attempting to escape, especially by tunnelling, fulfils all these conditions, and is the most effective occupation for assuring the health of prisoners of war.

When all is said and done, pure bluff in this war, as in the last, has paid by far the best "escaping" dividends. The Germans have not changed their mentality—if anything, I believe they are more stupid and easier to bluff than they were twenty-five years ago. Perhaps the Hitler régime with its rigid discipline and discouragement of individuality accounts for this and explains why, in spite of their increased experience in guarding prisoners, the same old types of bluff have been reproduced with monotonous success. Those prisoners who have been in the hands both of the Italians and the Germans report that the former were far more difficult to bluff. This one would expect, for the Italians are the more quick-witted.

One of the best instances of bluff in this war is, I think, that of two soldiers in an "other ranks" camp. By chance these two found a pot of white paint and two brushes. There was only one exit from the camp, and that was through the main double gates. From the Commandant's office inside the wire, a road led directly to the main gate. Starting from the office, the two soldiers, as though on fatigue duty, proceeded to paint a white line down the centre of the road. They took their time about it, and the guards got used to seeing them on this work. At last they reached the gate, and seeming in no hurry, stood there chatting and smoking until someone opened the gates for them and told them to get on with the job. The same thing happened at the outer double gate. Outside the camp they continued to paint a line down the centre of the road till, seizing the

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opportunity of a convenient corner, they unobtrusively disappeared.

As a comparison, the escape of Second-Lieutenant Marcus Kaye, R.F.C. in the 1914 war, is interesting. It is far more elaborate but the basic principles are the same.

The large building (formerly a workhouse) inhabited by the prisoners at Schweidnitz included a sunk rectangular courtyard in which they were permitted to exercise. This courtyard was bounded on one side by the main buildings, on the opposite and one adjacent side by high walls surmounted by barbed wire, and on the fourth side by a vertical brick faced embankment, some 30 feet high. The courtyard being sunk, the top of this embankment rose but slightly above the general level of the surrounding ground on that side, and from the top of its cliff-like face gardens and allotments sloped gently away from the camp. The buildings, walls, and embankment all carried elevated platforms on which the sentries were posted, so that the entire camp was at all times surveyed by the guards. The embankment carried two such platforms, one at each extremity. The sentries thereon could thus look down into the courtyard and observe every movement of the prisoners. These sentries went to and from their posts by permanent ladders reaching from the courtyards to the platforms. In the face of the embankment wall itself was an opening leading to a latrine hollowed out of the earth behind the wall and, running up the wall from the latrine, was a six inch air-duct for ventilation—a very necessary measure with the shallow cess-pools usually found in German camps.

The sentries were relieved at mid-day. During the morning Kaye paid several visits to the latrine, on each occasion concealing on his person portions of his escape kit which he hid in a previously arranged hiding place within. The last visit was timed for two minutes to twelve, at which time he entered the latrine in his ordinary uniform. At two minutes past the hour, when there were different sentries from those who had seen

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him enter, Kaye emerged from the latrine dressed in the nondescript clothes of a German workman and with his face sufficiently dirty to fit the part and to prevent recognition ; he was now carrying a small bag of tools—odd lumps of metal had to serve, provided they clinked when set down.

Kaye then opened his tool bag and selecting a suitable instrument proceeded, very deliberately, to take down, examine, clean, and finally replace the last two sections of the pipe.

Sentry-go is a boring job and the sentries watched him at his work with mild interest. Having finished the first part of his work, Kaye nodded to the sentry, indicating that he must do the top part of the pipe as well. The sentry nodded back ; so Kaye, after collecting his tools, climbed slowly up the ladder. The sentry said something to him as he passed and Kaye grunted a few German words in reply—he was not a very communicative workman ! Once again he repeated his operation, dismantling and re-erecting the pipe at the top and taking some twenty minutes over the job. The sentries were by now quite accustomed to his presence so that, when he had finished his work, it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to collect his tools and walk off through the allotments.

It will be noticed that in both these escapes the fullest use was made of the sentry's psychological defects. The timing was excellent. Any hasty action makes a sentry think and this must be avoided at all costs. But to prolong operations as these escapers did, doing everything in slow time, required very considerable nerve. To some extent the Germans in this war recognised their own natural stupidity and compensated for it by appointing specially intelligent men as "security officers." These officers were completely responsible for the defence of the camps and it was their duty to reduce the opportunities of bluff to a minimum, and on the whole they succeeded.

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There is, therefore, no doubt in my mind that the first step to freedom—the escape from the actual camp—was generally more difficult in this war than it was in 1914-18. The next step, the journey through Germany and the final return home, was much more difficult for a variety of reasons, particularly during the last two years of the war. First and foremost there was the close and cruel grip of the Gestapo on the whole country. The Gestapo wove its way into everyone's life and regulated everybody's movements.

It was extraordinarily efficient. Not only were there large numbers of prisoners of war on whom watch had to be maintained, but there were also many millions of foreign workers who, if not kept under control, would have been a serious menace to Germany. This resulted not only in there being intensive searches round the camps when any considerable number of prisoners of war escaped, but also there were at all times numerous searches and "check ups" in progress throughout Germany. An escaping prisoner of war was quite liable, having successfully avoided his own man-hunt, to run into someone else's. The effect of this, unless your papers were perfect, was the same—arrest and examination, which usually terminated the adventure. The amount of passes and papers a man had to have in order to justify his existence outside the limited area where he was permitted to live, was fantastic. Of course one might be lucky, as many escapers were, and miss all the searches and controls—in which case travelling by train was no more difficult than it was during the Great War, perhaps even easier, because the Hitler Germans were more inclined to keep themselves to themselves. Sergeant Nabarro, for instance, made a truly wonderful trip through Germany by train, although he knew but few words of German. He changed trains several times and bought tickets without apparent difficulty. His method was to give the name of the station in a bold manner and plank down sufficient money. The most dangerous

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moment occurred when he was sitting peacefully in the corner seat of a carriage full mainly of German civilians. To his consternation a nice old woman opposite him leant forward, touched him on the knee and said something to him in German which he found quite unintelligible. When he failed to react, she repeated her remark more clearly and the rest of the occupants of the carriage began to take an interest. On the rack behind him, Nabarro had a very Nazi-looking peaked cap. He stood up, put on his cap, looked as fierce as possible and said one of the few German words he knew—"Scheitz"—(an obscene German word). The whole carriage gasped with horror. Nabarro stalked to the door and there turned round and glared at the cringing occupants—"Schweinhünde!" he said (this means "pig-dog" and in German is a very insulting and foul expression). Then he went out and stood in the corridor. No German felt in the least inclined to approach or question such an unpleasant man. They left him severely alone.

Considering the number of foreign workers in Germany one would have expected that walking through the country would have presented few difficulties. Sometimes this was the case, and several escapers tramped long distances without hindrance, but usually an escaper ran into a control post and was picked up. I am inclined to think that prisoners made too little use of bicycles as a means of progress. On a bicycle a man could travel very nearly as rapidly as on the halting German railway system; also it is more difficult to stop and question a man on a bicycle unless preparation has been made to do so, such as a barrier across the road.

One sergeant in the R.A.F. stole a bicycle from a village in the centre of Germany and rode many hundreds of miles to the Baltic without once being stopped. Not only did he succeed in doing this, but he changed his bicycle for a better one several times *en route*, and as he pedalled through Germany, he often stopped and talked to British prisoners working near the road. Either he



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was unusually lucky or he had a natural gift for this sort of thing. He finally stowed away on a ship and reached Sweden. From his description the whole trip sounded ridiculously simple, but then the story of a first-class escaper who has luck on his side usually does sound almost too simple to be interesting.

The ease with which this sergeant bicycled to safety calls to mind another R.A.F. pilot, F./O. G. Milroy Gay, who, after bombing Brest, baled out over that peninsular and landed a mile or two from the coast in the north-west. This was always reputed to be a most dangerous spot. Milroy Gay, however, in full flying kit and in broad daylight, walked along the high road seeking help. A few German lorries passed, but no one took any notice of him. At last he saw a one-armed man working in a cottage garden, so he went up to the gate and hailed him. The man proved to be an old soldier who had been wounded in the last war. He asked Milroy Gay to come in and have a drink. After a few brandies Milroy Gay asked him when and from where the next train left for Paris. He was told that a train departed at 5.30 p.m. for Le Mans. So he borrowed a suit of civilian clothes, bought a first-class ticket and caught the train. At Le Mans he changed trains at night—always a dangerous operation for an escaper—and arrived at Paris without incident. If there had been a taxi at the Gard du Nord I am sure he would have taken it for the journey across Paris ; as it was, he caught the first available train down to Tours. At Tours he left the station, where there was usually a control post at night, without being questioned and wandered about the town during curfew hours without being arrested, till an early-opening café provided him with breakfast. He was pondering over the best method of crossing the line of demarkation when a young man sat down at his table. "You are an R.A.F. pilot, yes?" Milroy Gay agreed with him. "Well," went on the youth, "I am a member of the Resistance and am going south. Would you like to come too?" "I

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don't mind if I do," answered Milroy Gay. He crossed the Pyrénées with the minimum of trouble, but was arrested in Spain and spent three unpleasant weeks in jail before returning home. Somehow I feel rather glad that his luck or his skill (I am not sure which) failed him at the latter end—otherwise it seemed really too easy.

But to return to Germany and the difficulties of escaping from that country. It is only in Northern Holland that the western frontiers of Germany are not protected by the Rhine and the Maas—always serious obstacles to escapers. In 1914 Holland was neutral, and though the border between Germany and Holland was by no means easy for a tired man, nevertheless, once over, an escaper was welcomed by the Dutch and sent back to England.

In the 1940-45 war the boundary between Germany and Holland was feebly guarded by towers or log huts about one kilometre apart, and usually connected by a not very formidable wire fence. From time to time the ground between the towers was patrolled. Few escapers seem to have had any serious difficulty in overcoming this obstacle. The best way was to approach the frontier at night in open country, for in wooded country the Germans had a nasty habit of posting stationary sentries behind bushes. After the patrol had passed it was fairly easy to cross the wire, and even if a considerable noise was made in doing so, sufficient time always elapsed to make a safe "getaway" before the Germans arrived to investigate. Once in Holland, however, trouble was very far from being over. Proximity, trade relations, inter-marriage, and the similarity of language made it inevitable that the successes of Hitler and the lure of his doctrines should hold many attractions for youth. A certain number, therefore, of young Dutchmen were drafted into the Nazi police which controlled Holland. These Dutch Nazis were extremely dangerous to escaping prisoners, for they knew the difference between a Dutchman and an Englishman, which the normal German sentry did not. Also Holland is cut up by canals and the

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bridges are easy to guard. Swimming canals is not a task to be undertaken lightly by an escaper, desperately tired and half starved as he usually is.

One man who swam a canal in winter only avoided freezing to death by getting into a pigsty and cuddling an old sow. "She stank a bit," he told me, "but she was wonderful."

The following story of an R.A.F. pilot who baled out over Holland illustrates the sort of difficulties encountered. His aircraft was shot down and he landed in the first light of dawn not far from his burning machine, on an island a few miles long by about half a mile wide, formed by canals. He found himself in a field with a herd of cows. For a while he lay recovering from his rather heavy fall. When he felt better he started to walk towards the gate, but noticed that, owing to the heavy dew, he left a distinct trail of footmarks in the grass as he walked. With the burning machine so near he knew that a German search for him might begin at any moment, so he rounded up the cattle and drove them with him, thus obliterating his traces. Near a house he hid in a hedge and eventually attracted the attention of a labourer. The Dutch farmer was too frightened to take him into the house, but gave him food and some civilian clothes. Thus equipped, he reconnoitred one or two of the bridges, but found them all guarded, so he approached a house and knocked at the back door. His reception there was at first very chilly but finally the inmates seemed to thaw and advised him to attempt to cross by a certain bridge at the north end of the island. He left the house feeling a bit uncertain in his mind whether these Dutch had given him this advice to assist him or betray him. But half an hour later, when he observed several lorry loads of German troops moving rapidly towards the indicated bridge, he realised his doubts were justified.

Before anyone blames the father of a family for such a betrayal, it is well to remember that the penalty for assisting a escaper was death for himself and probably deporta-

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tion for his family, and that the dangers in Holland were far greater than in France or Belgium. Such a Dutchman under favourable circumstances might have been prepared to help an evader, but in this case he probably considered escape to be hopeless and assistance fatal to himself and his family.

It was obvious to this airman that the northern bridges would soon be impassable, so with the utmost caution he made his way in the opposite direction. Many of the smaller bridges over canals in Holland may be lifted at one end to allow barges to pass under them. At one of these bridges he saw about a dozen civilians, together with a few German soldiers, waiting on his side of the canal for the bridge to be lowered. On the far side was a control post and a couple of German sentries. As it was still early in the morning he thought that there was a fair chance that all sentries had not yet been warned to look out for an English airman, and in any case the longer he stayed on the island the more certain he was to be captured. So he joined the crowd. No one took any notice of him except a pretty girl with a baby and a pram. She glanced at him and then turned away—then looked at him again. He was sure she had guessed who he was. He moved quietly up to the pram and for a few minutes, whilst waiting for the bridge to be lowered, played with the baby. No word was spoken. When the time came to cross he took the handles of the pram and she put her arm through his and helped by a bright smile from the girl to the sentry, they crossed over together in perfect safety. I am glad to be able to record that this particular airman reached home, as he well deserved to do, though the long journey through France and Spain was far from sure and easy.

Another way out of Germany was through Switzerland, but Switzerland was entirely surrounded by our open enemies or by an unfriendly Vichy France. The Swiss frontier itself was probably as easy to cross in this war as it was in the last, but the approaches were even more

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difficult because the Germans near the frontier were constantly on the look out for escaping prisoners. The Baltic outlet to Sweden was, for some unexplained reason, exploited more successfully in 1940-45 than in 1914-18. It may be that the actual difficulties in both wars were roughly the same and that the greater success in this war is a measure of the increased skill of the escapers.

It is at any rate certain that in World War II the neutral skippers trading between German ports in the Baltic and Sweden had a very lively fear of the Gestapo. Only on rare occasions have they been known to accept willingly an escaper on board their ships. This is not surprising, considering that each ship before it left port was subjected to a close search in which stink or tear bombs were sometimes used by the Gestapo to smoke out anyone fleeing from Germany.

Not only had an escaper who had reached a Baltic port to find means of boarding the right ship from a heavily-guarded quay, but he also had to find a place in it where he could stow away until the ship was at sea. It was advisable also for the would-be stowaway to select a ship which was about to sail and to have with him ample food and water. If he hid in an empty coal bunker he was liable to spend the next few days avoiding avalanches of coal being poured down on top of him. The Blue Peter, a flag flown twenty-four hours before a ship leaves port, was a great help, but in war-time ships do not always leave at the appointed hour.

Even outside the three-mile limit it was not always advisable for an escaper to declare his identity. There is a story of one man who, when half dead from hunger and thirst, got a very poor reception indeed when he presented himself to the captain. The captain was both angry and terrified and actually turned the boat round towards Germany again. It was only the exceptional powers of persuasion possessed by this ex-prisoner which induced the captain to change his mind.

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With all these difficulties to overcome, it is marvellous to me that so many men succeeded in getting away by this northern exit.

One of the outstanding features of this war is the number of airmen who, having baled out over Holland, Belgium and France, succeeded in getting home without ever having been in the hands of the Germans—that is to say by evading capture rather than by escaping. No doubt they were greatly helped by the heroic assistance often given them by the Resistance movements in these occupied countries, but usually they owed their avoidance of immediate capture to two facts. The first is the initiative, determination and skill of these young men. With rare exceptions, every member of a crew that baled out ran, hid and bluffed like a first-class criminal with the police on his heels from the moment he touched ground. The second is the outstanding courage shown by the ordinary peasant farmers and their families. Every civilian in the occupied countries was fully aware of the risks involved, for the Germans had no hesitation in shooting anyone who assisted an evader. Nevertheless, it was usual for every evader—in spite of these desperate risks and often in spite of a close German search of the district—to be hidden, clothed and fed, and finally guided into safe hands. The children of these countries played a very large part, for they treated these fortuitous descents from the sky and the subsequent evasions as a new and exciting game. Indeed, most children of twelve would hardly have a memory of a time when there were no hated invaders for them to cheat and deceive. They played their part marvellously, and many an evader, with the Germans all around him, has followed a small child to a safe hiding place. For those of us in England who have only known danger from bombs, it is hard to imagine a daily life in which at any moment a parachutist might arrive in our back garden and we might be asked on the instant to take a desperate risk—not only for ourselves, but also for our loved ones. This is a terrifying thought,

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yet most French families accepted it as part of their patriotic duty as a liberation from frustration and as a means of reburnishing the honour of France dimmed by the surrender.

The story of F./Lt. Barclay will illustrate some of these points. He was a fighter pilot and was shot down over France. Being too low to bale out, he was forced to land in a ploughed field. There was a village about half a mile away ; near him in a corner of the field was a copse. His opponent in an M.E. 109 had no intention of allowing Barclay to evade into the quiet countryside, so he swooped repeatedly and prepared to fire if Barclay showed any signs of issuing from his machine. Barclay realised this and also knew that he had but little time to spare before the Germans encircled him. In order to convince his opponent that there was no need to hang about, Barclay lay back in his seat with his face turned to the sky, his mouth open and his eyes shut, pretending to be dead. This had the desired effect and the M.E. flew off. Barclay immediately jumped from his aeroplane and after an attempt, which failed, to set it on fire, ran at full speed for the copse. He had hardly got into the undergrowth before he heard lorries and motor bicycles coming towards him. Something had to be done quickly, for the copse was clearly the first place the Germans would search. He turned his tunic inside out. It had white silk linings to the sleeves. He threw away his flying helmet, ruffled his hair and pulled his trousers down over his flying boots and then rolled himself in mud and leaves. It was not a very good disguise, but it was the best he could do in the time at his disposal. Collecting a big bundle of sticks, he cautiously approached the edge of the copse and peered through a thick hedge on to the road. Although he could hear cars and motor-bicycles in the near neighbourhood, the road at that moment was clear. With some difficulty he pushed his way through the hedge, still carrying the bundle of sticks, but as he did so a lorry-load of German troops came round the corner. Leaning

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on one stick, with the bundle of firewood over his bent back, he stood still at the side of the road and watched them go by. They took no notice of him. A moment later Barclay siezed the opportunity to cross the road and thus broke through the ring of encircling Germans.

A few days later he found a warm welcome in a peasant's house. They were delighted to see him and to shelter him ; so proud of him were they that he was treated as a sort of pet. Nothing was too good for him. They deprived themselves that he might eat of the best, they invited their friends to visit him, and they took him to the village pub, where all the world drank to his health. It was really amazing how little regard some of these peasants paid to security. They must have realised the dangers they were incurring, though probably those who ran risks had had no practical experience of the Gestapo. Barclay, however, had no delusions. He thanked them kindly, but after a day or two moved off on his lonely walk southwards

His next hiding-place was very different. He was equally well treated and made equally welcome, but for fourteen days he had to remain in a back room, only issuing for a few minutes each night for brief exercise in the garden. One day a small girl arrived with a civilian suit for him and instructions that he should catch a certain train for Paris. He was given his ticket. There appeared to be little risk, for he spoke French moderately well and everyone except the Germans were on his side. The biggest danger for Barclay lay in his appearance. He was a tall, fine-looking fellow, and even in French clothes could hardly avoid being conspicuous, for there were few healthy young men left in France in those days. As he stood on the platform waiting for his train a German officer with his batman came and stood a few yards away. This at first did not disturb Barclay in the least, but soon he noticed, out of the corner of his eye, the German looking at him repeatedly and suspiciously. Barclay did his best to appear unconcerned, but when suddenly the



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German turned to his batman and, indicating Barclay, whispered something, it was obvious that action had to be taken, and taken quickly—but what? He turned slowly and glanced round him. At that moment a group of old market women with baskets on their arms clattered noisily on to the platform. Without a moment's hesitation Barclay gave a cry of joy and rushed towards them. He threw his arms round the first old woman and whispered as he kissed her, "Aidez moi, je suis aviateur Anglais." In a flash she not only grasped the situation, accepting the terrible risk, but acted as though she had been in the *Comédie française* all her life. She went off into a spout of French—they all shook him by the hand—they all kissed him—they welcomed him home. The German recalled his batman (who had by then moved round behind Barclay) and got into his reserved carriage. Barclay got into a carriage with the old women and was safe. I know of no better example than this of spontaneous skill on the part of an evader, and of courage and quickness of brain (which is the heritage of the French) on the part of those peasants. Barclay was an outstandingly good escaper; cautious, bold and intelligent. Having successfully passed this crisis, he returned home with little difficulty. But I have to record with real sorrow that this remarkable and charming young man was later killed in action.

Every evader or escaper has, with few exceptions, at least one moment of acute anxiety when his fate hangs in the balance. We hear of those ruses which were successful, but we seldom hear of those which failed. In general, however, it may be said that those who relied implicitly on bluff and on the stupidity of the German sentries got their reward. But when dealing with German officers and still more with the Gestapo, a nimble tongue and an unusually quick wit were needed, though it sometimes happened that a common British soldier succeeded in disguising his identity even when faced by an intelligent German officer backed by interpreters.

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I always enjoy the story of the three privates of the 51st Division who, following the fall of Calais, changed into civilian clothes and after a short spell of working on the land as peasants marched the whole length of France to the Pyrenees, which they finally crossed on their own after three attempts. The crisis in their escape came early during this remarkable trek.

In appearance they were typical Scottish gillies—broad, strong, thick-necked and taciturn. They bore no resemblance to the French peasants ; they knew nothing of the country and its customs, and they spoke not one word of French. How they got through to Spain is a mystery which the few words they spoke to me on their adventure leaves unexplained. At one place they were stopped by a German officer who, naturally suspicious, asked them who they were and whence they came. According to their prearranged plan they refused to understand and answered in Gaelic, their native language. They continued to talk in Gaelic among themselves. The officer then sought the assistance of various interpreters who tried the Highlanders in every known language, but without result—they went on talking Gaelic. Finally, in despair, the German produced a map of the world and laid it on the table. He indicated by signs that they should point to their country. After careful study, one of the Scots slowly and deliberately placed his finger in the middle of the largest bit of land on the map—the middle of Russia.

“ Oh, you are Russians, are you ? We never thought of that ! ” And as there happened to be a treaty between Russia and Germany at that time the men were liberated once more to continue their march south. Whether these Highlanders knew of the treaty and chose to indicate that they were Russians for that reason I never found out : they did not impart unnecessary information to anyone !

Very few men have evaded from Germany. The conditions for evasion were exceptionally unfavourable. The man who baled out and came down in Germany found,

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instead of friendly farmers, a hostile population. Every German who caught sight of an evader would surely report his presence to the Gestapo, and it was even probable that if several aircraft had been shot down, a parachutist might actually descend into the midst of a man-hunt.

The story of F./Lt. Pipkin gives a good idea of the immense difficulties a man encountered while evading in Germany.

Pipkin's aircraft was shot down right over the target whilst bombing Duisberg. He baled out over the outskirts of the town while the raid was still in progress and bombs were bursting around him. There were few people about, so that his actual descent was unnoticed. Without drawing attention to himself, he was able to discard a good deal of his heavy flying kit and make his way unmolested through streets of blazing houses with bombs still crashing down. At intervals he was forced to take shelter in dark dug-outs crammed with people, who were far too terrified to notice the clothes of any individual. He reached the edge of the town before the raid ended, and making his way as rapidly as possible past barbed wire entanglements, fences and other obstacles, reached a wood just before daybreak. Early next morning he heard soldiers massing on the road some fifty yards from where he lay. Listening carefully to the orders being shouted, he realised that the search for him had begun and that he had probably been seen entering the wood.

There was little time to hide, but Pipkin made the most of it. Selecting a small hollow, having first blackened his face with some dirt, he lay down and covered his whole body with leaves. Being almost invisible now as he lay on his back, he was able to see the soldiers as they came towards him. "They came forward in a line," he said, "about two yards apart and as they advanced they called out in English."

"In English?" I exclaimed when he told me the story, "I can't believe it—what did they say?"

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“ ‘Come here, Tommy,’ is what they shouted.” The German for “come here” being “Komme hier,” the mystery was solved.

He told me that one German trod within six inches of his face, but the line passed by without seeing him.

That evening just after dark, he emerged from the wood and started off westwards. There was obviously a camp in the neighbourhood, for he passed several soldiers who paid no attention to him, he having disguised himself as best he could. A little later, on a lonely stretch of road, he was stopped by an unarmed German soldier who made some remark to him to which Pipkin, knowing little German, was unable to reply. The soldier took him by the arm and after inspecting his clothes as far as he could in the dim light, tried to lead him towards the camp for further examination. But Pipkin was not prepared to be led, and an all-in fight developed quickly. For ten minutes the two unarmed men struggled desperately together. The German was the bigger and the heavier man and at first got the advantage, but never quite succeeded in reducing Pipkin to impotence. Both were in the last stages of exhaustion when by a lucky chance they slipped still locked together, into a ditch filled with water at the side of the road—the German undermost. Pipkin, exerting all his remaining strength, forced the German’s head under the water and held him there till he drowned.

Finally, after many adventures (unfortunately not known to me), Pipkin reached England safely, but I greatly regret to say that some months afterwards he was killed in an accident.

I am glad to be able to pay this small tribute to his memory.

Later on in the war, when the Allies first entered Germany, there were several indications that the German farmers, once the fear of the Gestapo was removed, were prepared to ensure themselves against the future by assisting an evader. The following is an example.

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An American Thunderbolt pilot was shot down a few miles east of Aachen, when that town was almost surrounded by Americans. The weather was cold and wet, but for four days the American hid in the damp woods, with Germans all around him, hoping that an American advance would come to his rescue. At the end of that time, as he was without food, it is not surprising to hear that he reached the limit of endurance. He realised that at whatever risk that he must either get food and warmth or else die of exposure. At dusk he made his way with infinite caution to a German farm-house about half a mile away. Climbing the gate, he looked round the court-yard for the door which would lead him to the hayloft, but came suddenly face to face with two Germans. One of them had a torch which he flashed on the American, who was in no condition to attempt to escape. He surrendered immediately and said who he was. The Germans took him into the kitchen, dried his clothes, fed him, and then hid him from their own troops for four days. In the daytime they took him into the woods to a small hut, and at night he returned for food, and slept in the hayloft. When the American soldiers entered the farm a few days later, the German farmer called up to him, "Come down," he said, "your comrades are here and all is well." And there followed a friendly gathering with congratulations all round. Such an episode was of course common in France and Belgium, but it is curious to hear of it happening in Germany. Nor was the knowledge that this American was in hiding confined to one or two Germans. The German family consisted of an old grandmother, a father and mother about fifty years old, a son who had been a soldier (now wounded and demobilised) a pretty daughter of twenty-five, and two land girls. Still more astonishing is the fact that occasionally villagers dropped in to see the strange pet these farmers were harbouring. From this one can only infer that a considerable number of Germans were consenting parties to this betrayal of their own side. The

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comment I feel inclined to make on this true story of German mentality is that the dominating motive in Hitler's Germany was fear.

Far the greatest number of evaders from France were members of the American Air Force. This is to be expected, for the bombing of French targets in 1943-4 was carried out largely by the Americans. Each Flying Fortress had a crew of ten, as opposed to seven in a Lancaster, and the bombing was nearly always done in daylight.

For some reason, possibly because the escape hatches on their machines were larger or more conveniently placed than in most of the R.A.F. planes, the Americans were exceptionally good at getting out of an aircraft when it was fatally hit. I believe it is true that once at least a whole crew of ten which had baled out successfully also succeeded in returning home. When the American armadas of several hundred machines roared overhead with German fighters swarming round them, it can be well understood that the inhabitants of the country, both German and French, took a very lively interest in the proceedings. The Germans stood by to send out search parties, the French peasants to give assistance to parachutists when they could do so without too much danger to themselves.

Most people imagine that the whole of France was swarming with Germans. But this was not the case. The chance of a man who had baled out arriving on a spot far removed from any German was really very good. The great majority of those who baled out and reached the ground unhurt in daylight had time to dispose of their heavy kit and their parachutes (or more often to find a peasant who would do it for them) and to reach a good hiding place before the Germans arrived. Intelligent tricks were often played to put the searcher off the track. One man laid out a trail of his flying kit—goggles, helmet, gloves, boots, etc., in one direction, and then ran in the other, with great success. A leafy tree

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in a forest was often found to be most useful, for it is impossible to search each tree. Usually, however, the peasants or villagers knew just where to hide an evader, and the children took the most active part as guides. There is every reason to believe that the Germans were aware of the constant stream of successful evaders who crossed the Pyrénées and returned through Spain to England. The Gestapo in France were gingered up by some high authority, control posts were placed at stations exits, and the most brutal measures taken against those who assisted evaders. But still the evasions went on with only temporary checks, for the cleverness and courage of those who helped evaders more than matched the increased energy and brutality of the Gestapo.

Gradually as time passed, a net-work of underground resistance (whose *raison d'être* was the rescue of evaders) was built up in the territories occupied by the Germans. This resistance movement was particularly strong in Belgium and France. It existed under greater difficulties and dangers in Holland; and in the latter part of the war, the Danes showed themselves both courageous and ingenious at the same perilous work. The earliest indication that some such movement would develop was the appearance of a young Belgian girl in the office of the British representative at Bilbao. She said that there were two British soldiers outside in a café, and asked for permission to bring them in. Having done so, she asked the Consul for 10,000 francs. When asked how she could justify a demand for such a large sum, she answered that she had brought these two men by herself all the way from Belgium and intended to go back for others. For three years this heroic girl, helped only by another girl of her own age (about twenty) conducted small parties of evaders from Belgium and Northern France, across the Pyrénées and handed them over to the British authorities in Spain. Eventually her activities became too well known to the Gestapo for her to remain in the north. She moved her sphere of operations first to the

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Tours neighbourhood and then to Bordeaux, always with the Gestapo close on her tracks. In 1944 it became clear that if she remained in France and continued her work, she must soon be taken by the Gestapo. Although she had opportunity to save herself, as she had saved so many others, she refused to leave France and was eventually arrested by the Germans. She disappeared and her fate is unknown.

At the end of July, 1944, Madame X and her old mother lived in a tiny cottage in a remote village in the Rouen district. During the previous years she had harboured many evaders and at the time of the great German retreat, five airmen were living in her cottage, or in the buildings around, waiting for the arrival of the armies of the United Nations. Those weeks when the weary, spiteful, and demoralised German troops passed through the country were particularly dangerous, both for evaders and more especially for those patriots who were hiding them.

However quiet and remote a village might be, there was always the chance that hundreds or even thousands of retreating Germans might suddenly appear and billet themselves in every nook and corner ; descending like a swarm of locusts, they ransacked the villages, eating up every scrap of food they could find. These men were too tired to maintain discipline, they had seen too much of death to have any respect for human life. At one moment they were near to tears—in fact, many wept bitterly and poured out their sorrows to Madame X in self pity at their sufferings ; at another moment they were ready to shoot to kill in savage spite if any incident displeased them.

For twenty-four hours twelve of these Germans slept and fed in Madame X's kitchen whilst the five British airmen hid as well as they could in the other two rooms in the cottage. She and her mother would have been shot immediately had these evaders been discovered. Every minute of those twenty-four hours was one of



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intense danger and strain. She practically gave up hope that they would win through, but her courage never failed. Then the Germans departed, and she left the cottage to make arrangements for a safer hiding place in the woods.

But though the days of the German retreat were often desperate and fearful days for the inhabitants, I sometimes feel inclined to pity the German soldiers, who with blazing hatred round them, struggled out of the land they had dominated for so long.

The Mayor of E. told me the story of the battle which took place when his village was liberated. "The British were in the wood over there," he said, "and the Germans occupied those orchards and held the line of trenches and fox-holes that you can see. It was a splendid battle, and I directed it."

"Really!" I said in some surprise. "How did you do that?"

"From my Mairie," he answered with mounting enthusiasm. "I got on to the village of X where the British were. You see, the Germans as they retreated, forgot to cut the telephone lines. There were Germans in my Mairie; it was their headquarters, but I had my office to myself. I got on to my friend at X and told him to fetch the Commander of the British Artillery. Then I sent out my runners. I learnt where the Germans had placed their batteries and where their infantry was concentrating. And the British commander took my orders and I directed the battle. Ah! but the British guns shot marvellously. In that battle only five British soldiers were lost. It rained shell on the Boche and they retreated."

"Marvellous!" I said, "and after the battle . . . ?"

"Ah, then I went out with my gun and watched for stragglers."

"Any luck?" I asked.

"Yes, I got four. Then the liberation came."

\* \* \* \* \*

## Escape of F./Lt. H. N. Fowler

The following stories of individual escapes prove that the present generation has nothing to fear from a comparison with the young men who undertook similar adventures a quarter of a century ago.

### II

#### Escape of F./Lt. H. N. Fowler

ON May 15th, 1940, F./Lt. Fowler was shot down by a Messerschmitt about five miles north of Camay, a village on the west bank of the River Meuse. As his aircraft was on fire he baled out and fell, as he could hardly help doing in this thickly-wooded country, into the middle of a forest. Beyond sustaining a gash in his head which bled profusely, he reached the ground unhurt, and after cutting a square of silk out of the parachute, with which to bind his wound, hid it in a bush. Keeping his identity disc and card and throwing away his revolver, Fowler then started to walk in a westerly direction through very rough and uninhabited country. Clad as he was in flying overalls and cumbersome flying boots, he was not well equipped for a long tramp, so that after five hours of heavy going he sank down somewhat exhausted and for a moment closed his eyes. When he opened them, a French soldier was covering him with a rifle.

Fowler spoke a little French and was able, by producing his identity card, to convince the man without too much difficulty, that he was an R.A.F. pilot. The Frenchman was one of six sappers who were trying to rejoin their regiment. With them he walked through the woods to Rocroi. Here he left them and joined a company of French infantry, commanded by a sub-lieutenant. The M.O. attended to the cut on Fowler's head and next day,

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in rather a disorganised gang, they all retreated westwards. At about 4.30 in the afternoon, they were fired on by a machine gun. Details of the battle which ensued are not available, beyond the fact that the party split up and answered the fire until they had used up all their ammunition. Finally they surrendered to a couple of German tanks. That night, Fowler and the French lieutenant were locked up in a cattle truck, and next day were taken to Bastogne in a lorry. From here they were removed, first in a column of prisoners and later by train, to Frankfort, which they reached on May 21st. This transit and interrogation centre for R.A.F. prisoners of war was known as Dulag Luft. The camp itself was situated north-west of the town in the village of Uberursal. They got a good meal and were told the usual bunkum about "kameradshaft" between the G.A.F. and the R.A.F.—the intentions of their captors being to lull the prisoner's suspicions and to encourage them to answer military questions or to let slip military information in the course of conversation. In fact at Dulag Luft every means was used of pumping the R.A.F. prisoners. One method frequently employed was to ask a newly-captured prisoner to fill up a false Red Cross form, telling him that unless he did so, he could receive neither Red Cross parcels or letters. The questions on this form were so designed that if answered they would give information to the Germans. Needless to say these bogus forms were never forwarded to the Red Cross.

Fowler and the other R.A.F. officers firmly refused to comply with the German request, and soon afterwards they were released into the main camp.

On June 5th, Fowler and nineteen other British left Dulag Luft and travelled by 'bus to Prenzlau, south-west of Stettin. Here they remained about a month in the camp, which except for these twenty R.A.F., contained only Polish prisoners.

Why they should have been sent to a Polish camp it is hard to imagine, but the Germans moved their prisoners

## Escape of F./Lt. H. N. Fowler

about in a way which seemed, to the prisoners at any rate, quite purposeless. From the point of view of escaping, however, these transfers of prisoners from one camp to another were a very great advantage. In every camp a certain amount of knowledge is accumulated in regard to escaping, with the subsidiary necessities and aids to this end. A man in one camp may be particularly skilful at making keys. He will impart his knowledge to his fellow prisoners, so that anyone leaving this camp will take the knowledge with him. It happened frequently that when one prisoner was caught on the frontier and had thereby gained some valuable details of the geography and position of the frontier guards, he was first returned to the camp from which he had escaped where his knowledge then became common property. After perhaps a fortnight or three weeks in the cells as punishment, the escaper was usually sent to another camp where he would similarly distribute all that he had learnt. On July 5th, Fowler was removed from Prenzlau and sent to Stalag Luft I. Germans always pretended that they treated the R.A.F. far better than prisoners in the other services. It is a fact, that for many months after their capture in 1940 most, if not all, the Army prisoners existed under dreadful conditions. They were terribly overcrowded, the sanitary facilities disgusting, and the food was so insufficient and nauseating that some men were unable, through sheer weakness, to walk upstairs without an effort. During these months the officers lived and slept in the clothes in which they had been captured. It was not till the end of 1940, when Red Cross parcels began to arrive in the prisoner-of-war camps in any quantity that conditions of life became reasonable. Only those who have themselves been prisoners, can fully appreciate how much prisoners of war owe to the efforts of the Red Cross ; from them the Red Cross has universal and unstinted praise.

In the early days, the R.A.F. camps were never so bad as the worst of the Army camps, if only because the

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overcrowding was less severe and the sanitation better ; but as regards food, there was not much difference between the two. In Stalag Luft I the German rations were scanty and extremely bad, the potatoes often being uneatable. The rations were weighed in the raw state and those which were bad were never replaced.

Major Burchard, the camp commandant of Luft I Barth, was kindly disposed towards the prisoners, but could do nothing to better their conditions, because the direct control of the camp was in the hands of the "Abwehr" or security officer, who was, as nearly always, an ardent Nazi Party man. The Abwehr officer at Stalag Luft I was a professor of psychology named Oberleutenant Doktor Ippisch, an extremely clever and troublesome individual. He instituted regular and exhaustive weekly searches of the prisoners of war and their quarters. In such conditions, the ingenuity of the prisoners of war was fully taxed. Hiding escaping material or making any preparations for escape became most difficult and yet these difficulties were overcome. Bogus German uniforms and civilian clothes were still made up out of odd pieces of material, and in spite of the lack of any real privacy, were stitched, dyed, pressed and hidden with astonishing success. One forms the opinion that the prisoners in this war were up against greater difficulties and overcame them with even greater skill than the prisoners in the last war. The Germans never had any doubts in this war that the prisoners were plotting to escape, and took every precaution that science and ingenuity could produce, to stop them.

It so happened that at Barth the earth was exceptionally favourable for tunnelling, and so many tunnels were started that the Germans planted instruments all round the camp (somewhat similar to those used for recording earthquakes) in order that vibrations in the earth, unavoidably made by tunnellers, could be heard. Opinions of prisoners of war differ as to the effectiveness

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of these instruments, but it is a fact that most of the numerous tunnels which were started in Barth camp were discovered. But whether or not these instruments interfered seriously with tunnelling, they frequently enabled the prisoners of war to get a great deal of innocent amusement at German expense. An automatic device was installed (with a dripping tap as its motive power), which imitated the noise of faint tappings in the earth so successfully that it kept the Germans in a constant state of anxiety. Besides their other activities, the Germans made strenuous efforts to overhear the conversation of the prisoners, but microphones installed in the wooden huts were mostly discovered by these experienced prisoners. The most effective device of this nature was a loud-speaker through which the prisoners-of-war amused themselves daily by listening to Lord Haw-Haw. When Haw-Haw was not on the air, a simple switch enabled the loud-speaker to become a microphone. This was only discovered because one day something went wrong with the switch so that German conversation from their control room was heard issuing from the loud-speaker.

The Germans even dug a tunnel themselves under one of the huts to enable an interpreter to "listen in" close under the floor. This crude effort was soon discovered and a large pail of boiling water was duly dropped, by accident, on the right spot and at the right moment. As a result no doubt the physical hardships of the prisoners of war were increased, but mentally they remained sane and healthy.

Fowler took a full part in all these normal activities of the camp. In November, 1941, he was made Parcels officer. From this one can conclude that up to that time the Germans had never caught him out on any illicit work. Part of his duty was to see that the Red Cross parcels, which by now were coming through in good numbers, were fairly distributed. To carry out this work he had access to the room where the parcels were

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stored. After a time, the guard became careless and would allow Fowler to enter the store room alone.

From odd bits of material, Fowler made himself a German uniform and smuggled it into the parcels room.

At about 10.30 on the morning of November 5th, he entered the room in the normal way, leaving the guard outside. A second door led into the compound in which was the commandant's office. Looking out of the window, Fowler could see several Germans walking around. He changed quickly into his German uniform, put the food he had brought with him into an old mail bag, slung it over his shoulder and went out into the compound. This compound which was reserved for the Germans was guarded by a single wire fence which could be climbed easily and quickly given the opportunity. He needed about thirty seconds during which time no German must look in his direction—thirty seconds while he was actually climbing the wire. It was dangerous to wait. He chose his moment, climbed the wire and dropped safely to the other side. Once he had touched the ground and settled the sack on his shoulder, his greatest danger was passed. He walked slowly to a small wood about fifty yards from the wire and there discarded his German uniform. Underneath he was wearing some very passable civilian clothes which he had also made for himself in the camp. Then he walked on to another wood about two miles away where he hid till nightfall. As he lay there he heard shouting and dogs barking and assumed that he had been missed and that the Germans were searching for him, but he was well hidden and the search passed him by. He had a map, a compass and ample food for the journey to Sassenitz, where he intended to stow away either in a Swedish ship or in a train ferry which ran from there to the Swedish port of Trelorborg. After dark he walked along the main road to Stralsund. At one point he boarded a slow goods train and got a lift

## Escape of F./Lt. H. N. Fowler

as far as Velgast and then continued his journey on foot, arriving at Stralsund at about 6 a.m. on November 6th.

The main obstacle for escapers making for Sassenitz is an iron bridge connecting Stralsund with the island of Rugen. It is some three hundred yards long. When crossing such a bridge, an escaping prisoner feels highly conspicuous ; he can hardly believe that the bridge is neither guarded nor controlled. The nervous strain is considerable so that the tendency to act in an unnatural and suspicious manner is much increased. As a matter of fact very few bridges inside Germany were guarded in any way. Rough calculations will soon show that there was insufficient man-power for such a purpose. To keep a guard on any point for twenty-four hours day after day (and making allowances for sickness or leave), a minimum of ten men is required. To guard all the bridges in Germany therefore, thousands of men would have been necessary. It was on the bridges outside Germany, in the occupied but still hostile countries, that guards were maintained.

Fowler saw no sentries on the bridge, but nevertheless with some trepidation started to walk across. A German civilian walking in the same direction spoke to him, asking him who he knew in Rugen. Fowler could speak a little German, but not enough for any connected conversation. He, therefore, attempted to convey several impressions simultaneously ; firstly that he was half-witted, secondly that he was an Italian workman on leave, and thirdly that he was going to Rugen for pleasure. With all these impressions, the German became confused and puzzled and began to shout, as Germans often do in such circumstances. The situation became so embarrassing that Fowler lost his nerve and turned back across the bridge to Stralsund. Altogether this was a very trying experience. In Stralsund he tried to steal a bicycle, but without success. Unfortunately, details of this attempt, which might well be both interesting and amusing, are not in my possession. The first efforts



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of an inexperienced thief are always a worth-while study.

Shortly after this failure, Fowler saw a number of workmen about to cross the bridge, so he mingled with them and crossed without incident. He walked along the road to Sassenitz for about three miles and then lay up in a wood for a couple of hours and ate some of his food.

Shortly after dark he reached Bergen and went to the railway yard, hoping to jump a train. Unfortunately he fell asleep and awakened only just as the train was leaving. Again in Bergen he tried to steal a bicycle and again failed, so walked on, rather tired, to Sassenitz, arriving there about 11.30 a.m. on November 7th.

His information was that the train ferry left at 1 p.m., so he took up a position from which he could watch the docks. He was not particularly conspicuous for he had managed to shave—an important point in Germany—but his clothes were torn and covered in mud. Near the docks there was a mixed crowd of soldiers and civilians and policemen. Fowler threw away his haversack and advanced towards the docks, thinking that he could mix with this nondescript mass of people without arousing suspicion. He was approaching some trucks when he was suddenly confronted by a policeman with a dog on a leash. When asked what he was doing in Sassenitz he replied that he was on a visit to his aunt, who lived in a street the name of which he had memorised as he had passed through the town. The policeman then asked to see his Ausweis (which is the German version of our identity card). Fowler said he had left it at home. He was then arrested. In the police station he was stripped and searched and immediately identified as a prisoner of war by the identity tag which he still wore round his neck. This simplified the work of the German police and he was returned under escort to Stalag Luft, where he was given ten days solitary confinement as a punishment for his efforts. The Commandant took quite a

sporting view of the matter, but the Abwehr officer (Ippisch) complained that he had committed a breach of confidence because he had taken advantage of his position as Parcels officer. Such an accusation was quite untenable, but nevertheless when his punishment was over, he was sent on to the "naughty boys' camp"—Oflag IV C—at Coldnitz, where he arrived on December 1st, 1941. The whole story of this camp will, no doubt, one day be told and it will make an enthralling story; but it must be written by one of the men who was there.

Four hundred prisoners of war were guarded by six hundred Germans. The prisoners of war consisted of roughly, eighty British, sixty Dutch, sixty Poles, a hundred and ninety French and Belgians. Since January 1941, there had been many shooting incidents of which the most noteworthy occurred about May, 1942.

The British started what was known as a "water fight." Now to the uninitiated, a "water fight" must sound deplorably childish, in fact a performance altogether unworthy of grown men. But it must be remembered that it is a matter of vital importance for the health and sanity of prisoners of war to overcome the boredom of prison life. Anything that will give momentary excitement, that will raise a laugh or that will annoy the Germans, even at the expense of some punishment, is neither childish nor is it to be despised. Demonstrations of high spirits, particularly if combined with disregard for authority, are essential to the morale and *esprit de corps* of a prison camp. Without some such outlet, prisoners cooped together as they are in grave discomfort, will surely develop selfish and egotistical tendencies which make life a misery for all.

In a "water fight," everyone wears a minimum of clothing and throws water at everyone else. Water is thrown by those in the court-yard and also out of the windows on anyone who happens to be below. The water fight that particular day was proceeding in a very

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harmless manner when the gates suddenly burst open and a German officer with twenty guards rushed in and ordered everyone to their rooms. As soon as the yard was cleared, they opened fire on the windows (in all twenty-nine shots were fired), wounding one Frenchman, so that he lost the use of his arm. This method of enforcing discipline was frequently used and usually resulted in some perfectly innocent man getting hurt. The only possible retaliation by the prisoners was known by the name of "Bosch-baiting." At Oflag IV C, under the able leadership of Wing-Commander Bader, every possible means of annoying the Germans was thought out with care, and practised with skill. It took innumerable forms, from setting booby traps for the Germans, to writing propaganda on toilet paper and loosing it to the outside world when the wind was favourable. Prisoners in Oflag IV C lived a hard but hectic life.

The camp was a special "strafe" camp reserved exclusively for those officers who had escaped from other camps, or had in other ways given special trouble to the Germans. For this reason the standard of escaping knowledge and experience was very high. The camp was virtually an escaping club and the officers spent a great deal of their time devising ingenious methods of getting out. It was usually considered best for an Englishman and a Dutchman to go together ; they made a good pair. From all the most promising places tunnels had already been dug and mostly discovered by the Germans, so that Fowler and his companions decided to start a tunnel from some unlikely spot. They picked on the "Feldwebel's" (Sergeant-major) office. Even in Oflag IV C where they ought to have known better, the Germans never quite overcame their belief in the value of locking a door. But picking locks is one of the first and most elementary accomplishments that a prisoner of war learns.

The Feldwebel's office had, besides a padlock on the

## Escape of F./Lt. H. N. Fowler

outside, a cruciform type of lock. For both these locks, keys were made without serious difficulty. The officers taking part were Lt. Wardle, Capt. Lawton, Fl./Lt. Fowler and two Dutchmen.

The plan was to cut a hole from the office into the clothes store next door. Every night one of these officers was locked into the office to carry on with the work and was let out again next morning after camouflaging the hole.

On September 8th, immediately after the 10 a.m. roll call, the six escapers hid under the beds in the sick quarters which adjoined the Feldwebel's office. Capt. Howe and Lt. Gill went with them. Evening roll-call was taken in the sick quarters, but Fowler and his companions remained undetected. The doors of that building were then locked up for the night in the usual manner, thus giving the escapers undisturbed access to the office. The eight of them then entered the office, removed the last six inches of plaster and cleared the way into a clothing store, which was outside the camp proper, but still inside the wire fence and the ring of sentries. It was quite common to see orderlies accompanied by German guards emerging from the store with bundles of clothing, and the scheme of escape was based on this fact. Four of the six escapers intended to dress as Polish orderlies, and two of the Dutchmen who spoke German almost perfectly, were to represent the escort—one dressed as a German officer and the other as an N.C.O. The German uniforms had to be practically perfect because it was necessary to pass in daylight within a yard of a German sentry. Such a plan of escape was bold in the extreme and iron nerves were required to carry it to success, but the basic principle had been tested many times both in this war and in the last and proved to be psychologically sound. So long as no one blundered, ill luck alone could prevent success.

The escapers had with them two boxes which looked like clothes chests and in these they carried their civilian

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clothes. One cannot but admire the wonderful attention to detail which makes this escape one of the most noteworthy and perfect on record. Capt. Howe and Lt. Gill let the six others through the hole from the Feldwebel's office into the clothes store and then, having obliterated all signs of the hole, returned to the sick quarters where they hid till the building was unlocked the next morning. The six escapers, now in the clothing store, plastered up and concealed the hole behind them and then waited for daylight. At 7 a.m. the guards were changed. It was necessary to wait till that moment because the new sentries would have no knowledge of whether anyone was in the store or not, and would therefore not be in the least surprised if they saw some orderlies, accompanied by a German officer, issue from it. At 7.15 a.m. the party dressed carefully for the parts they had to play. Lt. Donkers put on the uniform of a German officer and Van Doornick that of an N.C.O. Both these uniforms had been made in the camp and were, outwardly, perfect in every detail. The other members of the party put on dirty Polish uniforms and clogs. By 7.30 uniforms had been minutely inspected, some minor repairs affected and all was ready. Van Doornick had a set of skeleton keys and it was his job to open the doors and gates. First he picked the lock of the store-room door and let the party out into the yard, and then in full view of the sentry, carefully and deliberately locked the door again. Passing two more sentries, who both saluted Donkers, the party went through a second gate without difficulty. But at the last gate a serious check occurred. Van Doornick found that none of his keys fitted the lock and the party were just about to drop all pretence and climb over the gate, when a German guard hurried up with the key, apologising profusely for keeping them waiting. The guard opened the gate and stood at attention whilst they filed out, led by their officer (Lt. Donkers) ; Van Doornick as N.C.O. bringing up the rear, and the orderlies carrying the boxes. Once outside the gates, they all

## Escape of F./Lt. H. N. Fowler

made for the woods. There they destroyed their uniforms and donned civilian clothes. \*

It had been decided, very sensibly I think, that they should split into three couples. Wardle and Donkers decided to make for Danzig via Ulm ; Van Doornick and Fowler for Switzerland via Stuttgart, and Lawton and Bates for the same place, but by a different route. It was essential to get well away from the camp and to reach a railway station before the alarm was given. Roll-call was at 8.30 a.m. which gave them but little time, but arrangements had been made for this roll-call to be a particularly rowdy one in the hopes that the Germans might postpone it, as they sometimes did, when things got out of hand. This would give the escapers a few extra hours before their departure was noticed.

Unfortunately Wardle, Donkers, Lawton and Bates were all captured within five miles of the camp, but the exact circumstances of the capture are unknown to me.

Doornick and Fowler walked hard for thirty-one kilometres along the road, stopping for a drink at two inns on the way and reaching Penig by four o'clock that afternoon. There they got a train to Plauen via Zwickaw. In the train they spoke only when necessary and then only in German. Their clothes excited no comments. Fowler was dressed in a Naval jacket, R.A.F. trousers and a workman's peaked cap made from an R.A.F. cap and a beret—not a particularly good outfit, but good civilian clothes were very difficult to get hold of in the camp. It must be remembered, however, that in Germany there was the most astonishing medley of uniforms and nationalities—with luck almost anything would pass. Without luck a man was sure to be arrested and questioned whatever he might be wearing. Fowler also carried a small attaché case to give the impression that he was a workman on leave. Both had forged papers, and in addition to these, Van Doornick had a genuine Dutch passport and a forged visa for the Swiss frontier area. Fowler carried an Ausweis or identity card

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(forged, of course) with a photograph and papers stating that he was a Belgian workman on fourteen day's leave, with permission to travel on the railways. As an extra precaution he also carried a paper giving him authority to visit friends in the frontier zone. On the principle of never showing more of your hand than is necessary to take the "Kitty"—a particularly good rule if your hand is forged and you are not too sure of the forgery!—he decided not to show this last paper unless compelled to do so. They reached Plauen without untoward incident at 9 p.m., and had to spend five anxious hours in the waiting-room before they could pick up a train to Stuttgart. The train connection was most inconvenient. The time-table they had with them was hopelessly out-of-date, many of the trains having been cancelled. The Stuttgart train took them only as far as Hof, and the next one for Stuttgart which should have come in half an hour later, was six hours late and very over-crowded. It also took an unexpected route, probably owing to bomb damage, and did not reach Stuttgart till ten thirty the following evening. It had been a most exhausting journey and as both of them were extremely tired they decided (very rashly it seems to me) to risk sleeping in a small hotel at Mähringen in the south-east suburb of Stuttgart. Here they told well prepared stories which appeared to satisfy the manager and without being asked to show any papers, were given a very poor room with no blankets on the beds. However, after making sure of a means of safe retreat via the window, they slept peacefully.

Next day, after buying a map of the Swiss frontier in a shop, they booked through to Tuttlingen. All this may sound extraordinarily dangerous and unwise, but it must be remembered that not only were their papers pretty good, but that Van Dornick talked German extremely well—quite well enough to pass for a German in that part of the country. While he was in prison Fowler had also learnt enough German to enable him to make short

remarks without arousing suspicion. At Herrenberg the train stopped for some unknown reason, and they spent the whole day in a wood, waiting for another. This delay was both irritating and dangerous, for they were now in the frontier zone where policemen, dogs, searchers, and inquisitive inhabitants abounded.

In this region the natural boundary between Switzerland and Germany is the Rhine which flows due west, from Lake Constance to Basle. Here the Swiss frontier juts out north of the Rhine at many points, making the line between the two countries as complicated and irregular as the edge of a half-finished jigsaw puzzle. The boundary lines are sometimes little streams, sometimes roads and sometimes the edge of woods. It is very easy to walk into Switzerland and then walk out again into Germany without knowing you have done so ; many prisoners made this heartrending error both in this war and in the last. These Swiss salients have been used as a means of entering Switzerland by hundreds of escaping prisoners in both wars. When the Rhine is the frontier, there is no friendly or easy crossing, for the river runs swiftly with many swirls and eddies. Furthermore, on those places on the Swiss bank where a swimmer would most naturally choose to land, the Swiss put barbed wire under the water—many hundreds of men have been drowned attempting to swim the Rhine.

When in the close neighbourhood of a frontier, particularly that of Switzerland, the only knowledge of real value to an escaper must be so detailed and exact that from his map or his memory he can pin-point himself at any moment. At night this is always exceedingly difficult to do. Near the Swiss frontier the difficulties were much increased by the fact that sign-posts within twenty miles of the frontier had been removed so that if the way was lost there was little hope of finding it again except by luck or instinct. Fowler and Van Dornick were an exceptionally competent pair, but even they went wrong.

Leaving Tuttlingen on foot, for it was dangerous to



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approach the frontier more closely by train, they passed through Ehringer, where they were stopped by an S.S. policeman. It can be imagined with what intense anxiety they watched him slowly examine their papers whilst they showed outwardly the calmest confidence in these forgeries. The policeman let them pass. Apparently the forged visa attached to Van Dornick's genuine passport made a most satisfactory impression. From Hilzingen they knew the route by heart, or thought they did, till, skirting a wood, they came on country which differed slightly but suspiciously from that indicated on their map. Twice they forded streams which should not have been there, and with growing anxiety pushed on, hoping to find a railway. When no railway appeared they knew that they were lost. It was impossible, however, for them to be far wrong; after walking half a kilometre eastwards they came on a wood which on investigation proved to be the one they sought. Here, hiding in the southern fringe of it, they watched and waited within a few hundred yards of the frontier itself. In front of them lay a road which they knew was patrolled from time to time. The night was very still—so still that they could hear the sentries on their beats. Removing their boots, they awaited their opportunity, knowing that nothing but ill-luck could now prevent their escape. After half an hour of unbelievable tenseness, a patrol car came coasting down the road with its engine off. This was their chance. Slipping quickly across the road behind the car, the two escapers headed south and two hundred yards beyond the road crossed what they knew to be the actual frontier into Switzerland.

## III

### Escape of Captain A. D. Taylor

**D**URING the weeks which followed the evacuation from Dunkirk the escapers began to reach home by boat across the Channel. In those days before the Germans had taken full control of the coast, it was not very difficult to find a boat ; it was largely a question of luck, and the fishermen were sometimes able to give active assistance. One of the first escapers to reach England in this way was an Irishman—Lt. Doherty. After failing to catch the last boat from the Dunkirk beaches he managed to acquire some civilian clothes and wandered westwards, keeping near the coast. As he talked excellent French and knew French customs he was in very little danger of being picked up by the Germans in the confused conditions which existed at that time in Northern France. To the Germans he was indistinguishable from a bombed-out refugee. One day he went into a farm in the hopes of finding food and perhaps lodging for the night, but it was deserted. The farmer and his family had fled, leaving behind all the animals untended—the pigs starving in their sties, and the cows moaning to be milked. This was more than Doherty, who was himself a farmer, could stand. He decided to stay there and look after the animals ; he took the place over in fact, and soon had everything in order. When the Germans arrived a few days later he sold them butter and eggs at a good profit.

As always in those early days, the German invaders behaved very correctly, for it was part of their policy to encourage the French farmers. When a fortnight or so later the owner of the farm rather shamefacedly returned, Lt. Doherty handed over the farm to him in excellent condition.

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Meantime, Doherty had employed his time and opportunities to other purposes as well as farming. He negotiated with a fisherman for a boat, and having, with many regrets said good-bye to his farm, sailed away one dark night back to England. Lt. Doherty made escaping sound very easy.

Captain A. D. Taylor was also among the first escapers to arrive in England after a far more adventurous trip.

Here was a natural escaper, the genuine article, who looked upon his escape as a magnificent adventure—which it was—and told his story with real humour. He seemed to know instinctively when it was worth taking a chance and when he bluffed he went to the limit. He was so good an escaper, in fact, that I am sure only rank bad luck could have prevented him from getting home. On the whole I think the Germans got rid of him cheaply, for he would have been a perpetual nuisance in a prison camp.

On May 18th, 1940, his tank became involved in a tank battle near the village of Donge on the Brussels canal. From his description this battle did not in the least resemble the tank battle of my imagination. It was a scattered, unregulated affair, spread out over a wide district. He was chasing one tank down a country lane, and strongly suspected that he was being chased by another, when the disaster occurred. His tank took a corner too fast, skidded violently, and landed in the ditch at the side of the road—and that was that.

Though a bit shaken, no one was hurt. When the crew at length succeeded in extricating themselves there was not a soul in sight, the countryside was deserted and the battle had passed on. Without help nothing could be done to unditch the tank. Now that the excitement was over, Taylor, having had little or no sleep for the last four days and nights, realised that he was extremely tired. It was a beautiful day, with a hot sun and cloudless sky, so, picking a shady spot, he lay down and soon fell asleep. He was woken by a German soldier prodding

## Escape of Captain A. D. Taylor

him gently in the stomach with a bayonet. After being marched to a nearby village he was locked up in the church with a mixed batch of French and British prisoners. The search and interrogation which prisoners of war underwent in those days was mild compared to what it became later. At that time Germany had more prisoners than she could cope with ; she was winning the war, and was therefore not greatly interested in the plans of her opponents—she was doing all the planning.

Two days later Taylor took part in a parade of prisoners through the streets of Brussels and as was the common lot of British prisoners, was ill-treated, starved, and insulted by his guards. Finally he was lodged in the Grenadier Barracks at Brussels, where some decent German officers took pity on the condition of the British and bought food for them in the town. There he remained till May 23rd when, in a straggling column of prisoners, he marched once more eastwards. The days were very hot, and there was a terrible lack of water which was even more serious than the lack of food. Often the inhabitants of a village through which they were passing would bring out pails of water, and the guards, though allowing the French to drink, refused to allow the British ; it seemed to be the Germans' policy to exhaust and humiliate the British in every way they could. When some of the prisoners, who were too weak to go on, fell out of the column, they were forced back with rifle butts and many were brutally killed.

From the beginning Captain Taylor had determined to escape. At length his chance came. Some exceptional straggling and bunching, not entirely fortuitous, drew the attention of the guards and Taylor dived through the hedge. The column passed on and no one had seen him go. Only a few hours of daylight remained, so he lay still in the shelter of the hedge until it was dark, when he heard someone calling him from a house about thirty yards away. They had seen his escape and, though frightened, were willing and anxious to help. An hour

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later he set off again, much refreshed after a good meal, dressed in civilian clothes and in good heart.

His first astonishing objective was his tank, from which he hoped to rescue his shaving kit and some other personal property. In this first march he walked mostly at night and across country, obtaining food without much difficulty from outlying farm-houses. There were not many Germans in the locality, and the inhabitants, though always rather frightened, were friendly and helpful. By this time he had grown a beard and the blue serge suit was so dirty that he could pass easily as a tramp or a refugee. Somewhere en route through Malines he picked up a map of France out of a school atlas and arrived at his tank after a week's march. Apparently his tank had not been touched and there was no one about. He was just preparing to enter it when a German soldier appeared from behind a tree. "Nein, das ist streng verboten," he said, and moved Taylor on. This irritated Taylor a good deal—he felt it was his tank. The loss of the shaving kit and personal belongings was a great disappointment, but the encounter gave him confidence—he had met a German and had not been arrested. He apologised in French and went on his way, but henceforth travelled mostly in the daytime and on the roads, thus greatly improving his rate of progress.

During the next fortnight he was stopped many times by German sentries and asked for his papers. After an encounter or two of this sort Taylor developed a confident technique and no longer cared a hoot for German sentries. His usual plan, when asked for his papers, was to fumble in his pockets and curse, exactly as a man does when he has lost his railway ticket; then, when the sentry became impatient, he would point to a house in the distance (where clearly he had left his pass), and taking the sentry by the arm, attempt to drag him in that direction. This ruse, with variations, carried Taylor through many villages full of German soldiers.

Eventually he reached Ellezilles on the Brussels-Lille

## Escape of Captain A. D. Taylor

road, where he was stopped by a German of a more intelligent type. Taylor tried the old trick, saying that he was a native of Flobecq. (He always kept the name of a local village in his mind for this very purpose.) But this time, to his dismay, he was asked to describe the village square and give names of the streets. Having a nimble imagination, he supplied this information with little hesitation, but by sheer bad luck a French farmer happened to pass at that moment. The German beckoned to him and asked if he knew the village of Flobecq. "Certainly," said the farmer, and when asked proceeded to describe the main square and name the streets, giving answers which did not in the least tally with those given by Taylor. Once more Taylor was put under lock and key and two days later again found himself marching eastwards in a weary, straggling column of prisoners. But he was by no means discouraged. With his previous experience to back him, he was confident of escaping.

Even in those early days some sort of normal life was creeping back into the villages of France. Men and women were carrying on with their daily tasks and many of the cafés were open. It was whilst passing one of these cafés where the seats straggle on to the pavement, that Taylor saw his chance and took it. When no guard was looking he sat down quickly and called for the waiter. The column of miserable humanity moved on and left him sitting. He now determined to make for his old billet at Touffleur, where, during the "phoney war," he had made many friends whom he wished to meet again, not only with the idea of getting help and advice but from pure curiosity to find out how they had fared.

Henceforth he walked with somewhat greater caution, but nevertheless passed right through a German H.Q., which was then established at Pacq. In addition to his disguise of a thick beard and his now extremely disreputable blue suit, he made a habit of carrying an agricultural implement and found that, with this over his shoulder, he was seldom stopped—he became, in fact,

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part of the countryside, and no doubt looked like a villager pursuing his lawful occasions. After a long journey through La Bassée, Bèthune, St. Pol, and St. Risquiers he reached the village where he had been billeted, only to find it full of German troops. This did not deter him in the least from calling at the house where his old mess had been. To his great disappointment he found it deserted. He went into the house and locked the door. Going into the dining-room, he was horrified to find dirty plates on the table still unwashed from their last meal three weeks before, and the whole place in disorder as they had left it in their hurried departure.

Taylor, having an exceptionally tidy mind, felt strongly that this was not the condition in which a respectable officers' mess should leave a good billet so he set to work and washed the crockery and tidied the place up. It is almost unbelievable. Then he went upstairs to tidy the bedrooms. Whilst there he heard knocking on the door, and putting his head out of the window saw two Germans trying to get in. "Occupé !" he shouted, and waved them away.

"Danke !" said the Germans, and departed.

It is a little difficult to understand why these Germans, if they were seeking billets, allowed themselves to be turned away by a man who spoke French. It is possible that they were intending to enter an apparently empty house in an unofficial capacity and for unauthorised purposes. Unregulated looting was "streng verboten" in the German army, and on the whole the German behaviour in France was surprisingly correct. The word "correct" was how the French described it at first ; later they realised that there were more ways of killing a cat than by skinning it alive.

He looked up many of his old friends in the village, and though they were too nervous to give him much help, they were able to give him much needed information about the course of the war. They told him that the remnants of the British Army were in the neighbourhood

## Escape of Captain A. D. Taylor

of Boulogne and Dunkirk, and Taylor decided to go in that direction. In actual fact the evacuation from the beaches had now ended and no organised British army remained on the Continent.

During the next fortnight he wandered northwards, making for Calais. As he approached that area the dangers and difficulties increased. It is the story of bluff, ingenuity and "timing"—a story of numerous small incidents when his own excellent judgment of whether boldness would pay, or whether extreme caution was necessary, enabled him to avoid capture. Near Calais he found the situation hopeless, and turned south-west along the coast towards Abbeville, hoping desperately to find a boat. All this time he had kept careful notes in writing on matters of military interest that he saw, oblivious to the fact that, since he was in civilian clothes, he would most certainly have been shot as a spy had he been caught with these notes on him. On the Grand Pont bridge at Abbeville he was stopped and questioned by a German sergeant. Being quite used to this by now, it did not alarm him, and he poured out his usual piteous story of how he had been bombed out, lost all his papers and now, as a miserable refugee, was hunting for his wife and family, a story so perfect by now that he almost believed it himself. The sergeant, however, proved particularly tough, and though not appearing to doubt the truth of the story, locked Taylor up in a cellar for the night to be on the safe side. Also in the cellar was a French sergeant. A man full of gloom; a defeatist pure and simple. He and Taylor talked through most of the night. "The French are beaten," the sergeant told him, "the army is rotten—the politicians are rotten—there is no hope of recovery. England must soon be invaded and the war is lost." He advised Taylor to surrender. There was no sense in continuing—and there was no hope of escape, urged this miserable man.

Taylor at this time must have been profoundly depressed and unusually tired, for he allowed himself to be over-



## Escape and Liberation

persuaded and next morning confessed to the astonished German that he was a British officer and wished to give himself up. He had some difficulty in establishing his identity, and for a long time the German sergeant flatly refused to believe him. Finally he was put in charge of a sentry and marched to the German commandant in the next town. On the way an incident occurred which might well have had very serious results. Taylor had written his observations on German military matters on odd bits of paper torn from his note-book. He had done this for safety, so that they could be hidden easily. As he was being marched along it suddenly dawned upon him that, should these notes be found, he stood an excellent chance of being shot as a spy. He decided that he must destroy the notes at once, but with the sentry behind him this was a tricky business. As, however, he would surely be searched at the Commandanture, this was his last chance, and the notes were not even hidden—he could feel them in his pocket, two bits of paper, one covered with notes and the other yet a blank. Choosing his moment, he pulled out one piece of paper, but was “spotted” by the sentry, who covered him with his rifle and ordered him to pass over the paper. With intense relief, Taylor saw that it was the blank sheet, and on they marched.

. At the Commandant's office he was given a seat in the garden and, with a sentry on guard, was told to wait. He waited for an hour or two, and during that time destroyed the notes and revised his views on the situation. He now regretted bitterly having surrendered, cursed the Frenchman, and determined to escape again on the first opportunity. With his experience he had little doubt he could manage this and was consequently more cheerful than might have been expected. At long last the Commandant sent down word that he was too busy to bother with Taylor, and gave instructions that he was to be included in any column of prisoners that happened to be passing. So again Taylor found himself a member of a

## Escape of Private Gordon Instone

long column of prisoners, but this time mainly consisting of civilians sent off to work in Germany. As they approached Risquiers he found an opportunity to escape again. Again he passed through the countryside in his usual manner, his confidence now fully restored, and this time he made his way to Le Touquet. Here he called on Grant, the golf professional, whom he had known well in the days of peace. Grant was at home and quite undisturbed. For a week Taylor stayed at his house. The first evening, after a shave and a good clean up, Taylor and Grant celebrated their meeting by dining at the Balmoral Hotel in one of the biggest restaurants in Le Touquet.

"But weren't there a lot of Germans about?" I asked, astonished.

"Oh, yes," said Taylor, "swarms of them, but we were quite safe. No one took any notice of us, for who would expect to find an escaping British officer in such a place?"

The final escape to England is almost too fantastic and too simple to believe. The first necessity was a boat. Exactly the right article was discovered in the Le Touquet Sailing Club, but unfortunately it was without a mast. With the help of the local blacksmith, however, they rigged one up and a few days later Taylor, choosing his weather and his time, not only sailed out of Le Touquet, but was picked up by one of our patrol boats just outside the Estuary.

## IV

### Escape of Private Gordon Instone

ON May 21st, 1940, Captain Gordon Instone (then Private Instone), a gunner in the ranks of the 2nd Searchlight battery of the 1st Searchlight Regiment, R.A., found himself (after a number of adventures which cannot

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be recorded here) with his unit on the outskirts of Calais. His job was to assist in maintaining the weapons and equipment, including telephones, of about twenty searchlight detachments. He was therefore a skilled fitter and electrician. He was twenty-three years old. On May 21st his unit, by means of a portable receiving set, took in the astounding news, issued by the B.B.C., that Boulogne had been entered and captured by enemy tanks. No one at first believed it—it seemed impossible. If true, however, it meant that all the troops in the neighbourhood of Calais were surrounded and were likely in the near future to be attacked by German tanks from the south. Soon after the receipt of this disastrous news, survivors from Boulogne began to trickle in and the accuracy of the B.B.C. could no longer be doubted.

That night it was decided to withdraw all units into the outer perimeter of Calais whilst one brigade of infantry attempted to hold up the German advance in the Boulogne road. As night came on heavy mortar and gun-fire could be heard approaching ever nearer and nearer from that direction. The roads between the searchlight battery and Calais being already controlled by the Germans, the transport vehicles and heavy equipment of the units were immobilised and destroyed, and the men in small parties made their way cautiously over the fields, dykes, and canals, past the German patrols and joined up with the garrison at Calais just before dawn.

Calais itself had no defences against an attack from the land side. There were two coastal batteries, but as their guns pointed only out to sea, they never came into action. In all, and including about 800 French troops who fought well, the total garrison in Calais amounted to hardly 3,000 men, consisting mainly of a battalion from the 60th Rifles, one battalion of the Queen Victoria's Rifles and one from the Rifle Brigade. In addition there was a battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment and an Anti-Tank battery besides fragments of many other units, including military police, clerks, cooks, and dispatch riders. Their

## Escape of Private Gordon Instone

heavy equipment consisted of six light tanks and the same number of anti-tank guns. Opposed to this force, and travelling rapidly up the road from Lissant, were nearly 200 German tanks, supported by 30,000 infantry from two Panzer divisions and several batteries of artillery. The Luftwaffe was also there in strength to give ample support to the ground forces. Beyond Calais were the beaches of Dunkirk, where 300,000 men of the B.E.F., now nearly defenceless, were awaiting evacuation. The warding off of a disaster, greater by far than British arms had ever suffered, depended almost entirely on the defence of Calais.

It is difficult to understand how the Germans could have misjudged the true position or, as they must have done, so over-rated the strength of the opposition at Calais, as to permit this handful of men—however brave and determined—to hold up their advance for these few fateful days. It seems sure that the defence of Calais must go down in history as a decisive episode.

Besides the lack of men and equipment, the garrison were short of food and they were handicapped by a further tragedy which seemed like a final disaster. On the afternoon of May 23rd, two motor ships docked in Calais, having on board munitions and equipment for the infantry. The difficulties of unloading were much increased by swarms of refugees and various small units who, seeking the nearest port, crowded towards the docks with vehicles of every description and jammed the roads about the harbour. Nearby the docks were two hospital trains which had reached Calais after vainly attempting to embark their 600 wounded at Dunkirk and Boulogne. One ship was emptied and partially filled with wounded. The second ship was still partly full of most valuable and needed stores when, either owing to a misunderstanding or possibly to a false order passed by a German agent, the second ship as well as the first, moved slowly away from the docks, and to the dismay of all, set sail for England. The defence of Calais has already been

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brilliantly told. Here it is only possible to touch on a few incidents which have remained more vividly than others in the mind of one man who took part in the siege.

For three days the garrison were bombed and shelled and mortared ; Stukas in relays roared down on them with screaming syrens ; they were sniped at from all sides by Fifth Columnists and by Germans who made their way in disguise into the town which was still full of French civilians. It was impossible to deal effectively with snipers who could turn themselves into civilian non-combatants at a moment's notice.

A tank barrier was formed by placing all available motor transport (numbering about two hundred) engine to tail-board—in front of the trenches. This proved most effective when covered by heroic men with anti-tank guns. The rain of shells and mortar bombs never ceased, though from time to time it rose to even greater intensity. There was neither rest nor shelter for any man of the little garrison.

The casualties mounted rapidly and intolerable weariness all but incapacitated the remainder, but still the Germans failed to make good the road to Dunkirk. Two German batteries firing from the woods at Guines were specially offensive, and it was a great moment when two destroyers, H.M.S. *Verity* and H.M.S. *Windsor* appeared a mile off the coast, and concentrating their fire on the battery they could see, put every gun but one out of action.

Over Calais hung a heavy pall of smoke rising from a fire in the oil storage tanks on the west of the town. This smoke had some advantages for the garrison, for it made it more difficult for the Stukas to operate. All this time it is interesting to note that the military police kept order in the town and sternly refused to allow the war to interfere with discipline. It is a fact that one despatch rider, carrying an urgent message, was stopped by them in a burning street and his name and number

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taken for being improperly dressed—he was not carrying his gas-mask. We are an astonishing nation.

It is also true that when water was practically unobtainable, it was still possible to find bottled beer in the shops *and pay for it*.

At one time during the siege two more ships entered the harbour and preparations were made to evacuate at any rate some of the garrison by sea. Instone was among those who were marched from the trenches to the harbour and his contingent waited in the comparatively peaceful dock area, hoping and praying that they would be in England in a few hours. The suspense, with that hell behind them and the hope of safety before them, was pretty desperate. Then came a counter order, and with indescribable feelings of frustration and disappointment they were marched back into the battle with instructions to fight to the last man and the last round. By then little ammunition was left to fight with; the anti-tank guns were nearly all out of action and the perimeter was no longer defensible.

At dawn on Sunday (May 26th) the few hundred men who remained retreated to the beaches, carrying what wounded they could with them. Even then, though repeatedly called upon to surrender, they refused and many stood waist deep in the sea as their only cover against the German fire. As our men stood in the water, the Germans opened up on them with artillery, with mortars, and finally with machine guns from the dunes. At 9 a.m. the German artillery were reinforced by the Luftwaffe, and from 10 a.m. onwards there were continuous low level attacks from three squadrons of Stukas. The weather was very hot, the sky cloudless, and the sea like a lake. The English coast could be seen clearly. Two hundred only of the garrison now remained and these had had neither food nor sleep for three days.

With their armament reduced to one Bren gun and one magazine, the defence of Calais was over. The last order, "every man for himself" was given. Many men

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attempted to reach the British lines near Gravelines. The survivors—among whom was Instone—were rounded up on the beaches about five miles from Calais by German tank personnel.

Instone had come through the battle miraculously unscathed, though his battle dress had been holed several times by splinters. On one occasion a shell had burst above a group of seven or eight men and he alone had been unwounded, but probably most of the survivors could tell of similar experiences. No one could have remained alive and unwounded through the siege of Calais without quite unusual luck, and it will be seen in this story that Instone's luck, aided by his skill, held to the end of his adventures.

Instone and those around him, on his suggestion, made a pile of their private papers and set fire to the lot. In due course they were formed up and marched back through Calais and finally imprisoned in the stadium at Desvres, which the Germans were using as an advanced prisoner-of-war cage. Oddly enough two other escapers, Embry and Treacy, whose stories are told in this book, were also in the same cage and left the camp that same evening in the same column of prisoners. This column, nearly a mile long, was heavily guarded and brutally handled by the Germans. It seemed as though deliberate efforts were being made to break the spirit of our men. The marches were dragged out interminably, and for the first five days, little or no food was given to the British. If any man fell out, he was encouraged to continue with the butt end of a rifle; if water was offered by the villagers (who frequently stood by the roadside with buckets in their hands), it was dashed to the ground by the guards. Often there were tears in the eyes of the French women as they watched this pathetic column of exhausted men stagger by. The British brought up the rear, and on the few occasions when soup was available during halts, it was given first to the French, and little, if any, reached the British end of the

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column. Instone himself was twice struck with a rifle butt, and was only saved by his tin hat from serious injury. Most of the men had already been fighting for several days with practically no food or sleep before the march started in the sweltering heat, and it was only natural that morale should have become exceedingly low as a result. Even so, they were greatly cheered when an R.A.F. fighter appeared overhead chasing a German bomber which it shot down very neatly into a wood half a mile away. When three cheers broke out at this heartening sight, the Germans were furious and threatened to shoot.

In spite of his exhaustion and in spite of what he had already been through, Instone somehow retained sufficient strength and courage to make two attempts to escape. In the first he was discovered crawling through a hedge during a temporary halt. He was thrown roughly back into the column and warned that he would be shot if he attempted to escape again.

The second and successful escape took place in broad daylight while they were passing through a village near St. Pol. There was a stream running by the side of the road and Instone, seizing a favourable moment, plunged into it and hid in the rushes. For an hour he remained up to his neck in water, his face plastered with mud, whilst an intensive search was carried out in the barns and hedges in the neighbourhood. At last the Germans gave it up and the column moved on. Emerging very cautiously from his muddy bath, Instone made his way across a couple of fields to a barn a few hundred yards distant.

There, after narrowly avoiding two German soldiers, he was discovered by a farmer; but, there being a German headquarters in the village, the farmer was too frightened to help either with food or clothes and was only anxious that Instone should depart quickly. Instone at that time was in a pitiable state. He was still in battle dress but so dirty as to be almost unrecognisable as a British



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soldier. From lack of food and from the long marches, he had almost reached the limit of his strength. He had made no plans and found it difficult to solve the problem of where to go next. Holland and Belgium had been invaded ; to reach Switzerland he must pass through most of the German army ; Spain was nearly 500 miles away. After much thought he decided to head for the north of France in the hopes of getting a boat or even of making a raft on the chance he might be picked up by the British Navy, who at any rate still ruled the Channel. His decision made, he lay down on a heap of straw and went to sleep. At midnight he roused himself, and although still unbelievably weary, started on his long and lonely trek towards the coast. The days which followed differed little one from the other except in degrees of hunger, cold and exhaustion. He had no map, so he steered by the stars or used his watch and the sun as a compass. He fed on raw vegetables and slept in the woods during the day ; at night he pushed on across the fields, realising that he could not go on much longer because his last strength was ebbing fast. After crossing a river near Hesdin, he came upon a friendly farmer. For the first time for many days he had a good meal and a long sleep in safety and warmth.

Next day, dressed now in blue workman's overalls instead of his battle dress blouse, he continued his march, feeling marvellously refreshed and encouraged. He even felt cheerful enough to undertake offensive action against the enemy when opportunity offered. Finding a German telephone cable, he disconnected the aluminium sockets, removed the terminals, and re-assembled the line—thus concealing the break. He passed a German sentry without arousing suspicion by pretending he had a wooden leg. But, though temporarily cheered by these minor successes, soon a desperate weariness came upon him again. Finally he developed a high fever from prolonged exposure and exhaustion, and was taken into a home for the aged and imbeciles where he was given

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food, medical attention, and put to bed in an attic. By June 4th, having been in bed a week, he had recovered sufficiently to walk about in the grounds. On that particular day some German medical officers were visiting the home seeking additional accommodation for their wounded. Instone mingled with the inmates and shammed insanity with such success that one of the German medical officers expressed sorrow that one so young should be thus demented !

The superintendent of the hospital was very friendly, and one day he informed Instone that an R.A.F. officer was being hidden in the village of Buere le Sec. Instone at that time was feeling desperately lonely—he yearned for English companionship. So, borrowing a bicycle, he rode to Buere le Sec and started to look for the farm where the R.A.F. pilot was supposed to be in hiding. He saw, standing in the doorway of a farm-house, a “farm boy” well over six feet high, wearing clothes which fitted him so ill that the sleeves were nearly up to the elbows, and the trousers little below the knees. Instone guessed at once that this must be the Englishman. In this however he was quite wrong, for Fl./Lt. Treacy, was an Irishman, if ever there was one. “You’re British?” said Instone, and the two shook each other warmly by the hand. For the first time for many weeks, Instone and Treacy were happy. Retiring to the little garden behind the farm, they exchanged the stories of their adventures and planned to escape together—perhaps the two greatest escapers who have ever combined forces.

They decided to make for the coast and to meet again in a week’s time after they had collected the necessary kit. The next week for Instone seems to have been a busy one. The Germans were intent on moving all French males of military age to Germany, so that it was thought advisable for Instone to move to a more secluded farm. Here he was fully occupied, not only on the farm and with house-work of every description—from feeding

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the pigs to making the bread—but also fell mildly in love with the farmer's daughter, a love which was fully reciprocated. When, therefore, Treacy appeared according to programme, Instone found the parting from these good friends by no means easy. Next morning, Treacy and Instone now well equipped for the adventure, set forth. After an arduous march, they reached Gamiers only to find it full of German troops and the coast heavily guarded. The chance of getting hold of a boat seemed hopeless. However, they walked on into the village fearing that, if they turned back suddenly, it might arouse suspicion. Passing a German H.Q. and several sentries they were at last stopped by a German soldier. Instone, who now spoke French extremely well, persuaded the man that they were refugees, but the German warned them to leave the next day. They then called on the mayor and disclosed their identity but he, having several Germans billeted on him, could give no help. Eventually they slept in a garage and only escaped from the town with much difficulty the following day. By this time Instone had developed a special technique for dealing with German sentries. He would walk up to them and speak to them sympathetically in French. This apparently so flattered them (for they, poor things, were accustomed either to being totally disregarded or to receive only sour glances from the peasants), that he was invariably allowed to pass without being asked for his papers.

On the outskirts of the village, Instone and Treacy actually found a boat, but they saw a patrol approaching and realised that the only thing to be done was to retrace their steps twenty-five miles back to the farm whence they had started. Next day they arrived there, worn out and disheartened, to find that a British bomber had been shot down in the neighbourhood. One of the crew was supposed by the Germans to be hiding in a farm nearby and a search was in progress.

The Germans had arrested twenty boys—one from

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each of the farm-houses—and threatened to shoot them if the missing pilot was not handed over within twelve hours. When Instone and Treacy heard of this, they offered to surrender, but the villagers indignantly refused to allow them to do so. Next day the boys were lined up for execution, in the village square, but after a tense and dramatic scene, during which two of the boys fainted, the execution was called off by the Germans. Perhaps it was never intended to be more than a threat.

Owing to this incident, the whole district was highly dangerous for escapers. Instone, however, was not capable of moving. He had hardly recovered from his illness, and as a result of the fifty mile march to Gamiers and back, his legs and feet were so badly swollen as to make marching impossible. With the greatest regret he and Treacy decided to part. A few days later Instone was picked up in a café by a German officer. The Germans were at that time collecting all Frenchmen and sending them to Germany. Instone was fully aware of this danger and had a well rehearsed story for such an eventuality. When interrogated he posed successfully as a Belgian refugee, but nevertheless, to his great disgust, he was pushed into a lorry with two German sentries and told that he was now on his way to a labour camp in Germany. After a journey of fifteen to twenty miles along country roads, Instone saw his chance and took it with a courage it is impossible to praise too highly. After all he had been through, he was prepared to take any risk to avoid the life of a slave labourer in Germany—the thought was quite intolerable. For a time he pretended to sleep, till he saw through his half-closed eyes, that one of the sentries was also dozing and the other, with his helmet on the floor and his rifle between his knees, was peacefully eating his rations.

Picking up a portion of a jack which lay on the ground behind him, Instone suddenly leapt up and with two blows killed both his guards. Fortunately neither man had time to cry out and the rattling of the lorry

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drowned the noise of these operations. The lorry continued at high speed. Instone then climbed on to the hook at the back and from there jumped from the fast moving lorry on to the road. The fall badly bruised his shoulders, but he reached the cover of some woods without being seen. After half an hour's rest, he made off in the direction of Hesdin—back to his friendly farm. On arrival there he learnt that a French lieutenant, Roger Creplet, had lately arrived and was also being hidden. A week later Instone and Creplet decided to make the journey to Paris together. During the phoney war, Creplet had been one of the garrison of the Maginot Line, and only a few weeks before he met Instone had returned to Paris on short leave and there married a young wife. Naturally Paris, in spite of its occupation by the Germans, drew him as a magnet. It is also probable that, for a Frenchman, Paris was the safest place to hide—and if it was safe for a Frenchman, why not for Instone, who by now talked French well enough to pass as a Frenchman with any German who was not a skilled interpreter? So the two set off for Paris together. On the whole it was a pleasant journey of nearly 200 kilos and it took them about a fortnight. They travelled mostly by day, sleeping in barns and feeding on fresh fruit and raw vegetables, though sometimes they obtained food and lodging in the villages. They crossed the Seine in a dinghy in the company of three German soldiers on leave (paying two francs for the trip) and that night reached the small town of St. Germain and lodged in a café.

Getting into Paris presented some difficulties because all the roads were closely barricaded. They succeeded finally by approaching the driver of one of the fifty police vans which were running a shuttle service, bringing refugees out of Paris and setting them on the road twenty miles to the north. Instone and Creplet told the driver that they were two escaped French soldiers. He then agreed to "arrest" and take them into the city. The

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Germans searched the van at the barriers, but merely thought they were two convicts. For the next two months, July and August, Instone worked in Paris, but here no more than a brief sketch can be given of his experiences. For most of the time he lived with Roger Creplet and his wife, passing off in the neighbourhood as a cousin. In the daytime he worked as a fitter in a garage where German ambulances were repaired. How he was able to work or buy food or even exist in moderate safety without correct papers, it is difficult to understand. At night, after his labours for the Germans, he frequently salved his conscience by doing skilful damage to the telephone system. Being an electrician he was therefore also a capable saboteur. He also acted as a maid of all work in the Creplet *ménage*—washing up, cooking the dinner, and last but not least, standing in the endless food queues in the Paris market. He joined heartily in the standard Paris amusement of misdirecting Germans, and spent some of his spare time in the museums and the art galleries where endless parties of German soldiers on leave were conducted round by French guides; in fact he faded into the normal Parisian life of those days and appears to have aroused no one's suspicions. There is no escaper, that I know of, who had quite Instone's flare for camouflage. From the first, he never had the least difficulty in passing German sentries—nor did his quick wit and sound judgment ever fail him. At the same time he was prepared—as we have seen—if the occasion required it, to take drastic and decisive action almost regardless of the risk involved. I say almost regardless, because each desperate deed was accompanied by cunning and judgment of a high order.

His two escapes, one from the column and the other from the lorry, are admirable instances of his ability to combine daring with skill. It is my opinion that there has been no escaper in two wars, who, given an equal chance, was more certain to escape than Instone. In Paris he quickly learnt to talk French really well and also

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made the fullest use of his abilities as a mechanic and electrician. One day, when talking to some French soldiers, he learnt that the Germans had set up a demobilisation bureau for French soldiers in the Place de la Concorde. He, therefore, visited the German H.Q. and by dint of questioning those who had been through this "sausage machine," got minute details of the exact forms required and the questions which were asked. He soon realised that there was "scope for talent." The obvious thing to do was to obtain or forge the papers of a French soldier, but those papers were so numerous and the questions asked so pertinent, that the hope of passing successfully would be small.

In the second room or stage, however, all the information required was condensed on to one relatively small piece of paper. This paper Instone, with great labour and the help of his host's typewriter, proceeded to forge. He then filled in suitable answers in indisputably French handwriting. Finally, with the help of a raw potato, he fixed the necessary stamp and filled in the colonel's signature in blue ink—on the basis that the more different coloured inks there are, the more authentic a form will appear. With this document (in which he had incidentally promoted himself to sergeant) he presented himself at the second stage of the demobilisation "machine," having skipped the first. In a small office at the local police station, before a German corporal and a French policeman, he was officially demobilised and given 200 francs. Later he was given a further 800 francs together with a ration card, *permet de travail*, and *permet de domicile*. His position was now practically impregnable, for his papers were in order; they were not even forgeries.

He now felt himself adequately equipped to leave Paris and to try to reach Marseilles. Most curiously he never seems to have thought of making directly for Spain, which by then was the obvious and almost the only route to England.

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On September 8th he set out alone, and after a tedious and rather miserable march reached Chalons-sur-Saone on the 21st of that month. Hunger, cold, wet clothes and blistered feet never worried him seriously, but the lack of company depressed his spirit and lowered his morale. Knowing little about the line of demarcation, he decided that it would be easier and safer to cross in the daytime. Perhaps he thought there might be fewer sentries, or that if stopped he could, with his perfect French and perfect papers, bluff it out with ease. Actually the line of demarcation was never difficult to cross if the available facilities were employed. On each side of the line in nearly every village guides could be found who for a fee (which varied from a few francs to a few thousand francs) would conduct individuals or even small parties over the line at very small risk. The basis on which the fees were computed was a rough means test, but escaping combatants either paid half the price or were taken over for love.

Instone, advancing with great caution, had reached what he believed to be unoccupied France when he was questioned and finally arrested by two Germans. In spite of all his protests and indignation, he was led across some fields and along railway sidings into the waiting-room of Châlons railway station. Here he was questioned by a German officer. He produced his papers and told a piteous story of his wife and child, who, he said, were dying in Lyons hospital. He got no sympathy. He was told that, as he was of military age and had broken German demobilisation orders in crossing the line without special permission, he would be sent as a labourer to Germany. Once again he was under lock and key—this time in a waiting-room with two sentries outside the door. Although he had been searched, his sachel, which contained a reserve of civilian clothes, maps, compass, shaving kit and tinned food, was left on the floor unnoticed—an admirable example of German stupidity. Here for a time he waited miserably for the morning train to Paris, whence he would be sent on to Germany.



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That evening he determined to make one more effort for freedom. He kicked on the door until an officer appeared, and speaking in French begged to be allowed to buy food at the station buffet. After some hesitation the officer gave consent. The buffet was crowded with French civilians and German soldiers who had apparently just come off guard duty. One of Instone's sentries waited outside the door and the other came in with him. Seizing an opportunity when the inside sentry was engaged in conversation, Instone slipped out of the door back on to the platform. By great good luck the sentry outside, though only two feet away, had his back turned and was momentarily engaged in trying to keep the entrance to the buffet clear. Quickly and silently Instone slipped along the platform till he came to a door with a notice in German written on it. There was no time to hesitate. He opened the door and went in, shutting it quietly behind him. It was apparently a German mess, for six officers were sitting at a table drinking beer. They looked up in surprise. Though seriously shaken, not for a second did Instone hesitate—it was essential that he should look as if he had a right to be there. He was an electrician, he told himself, and he had come to mend the light. In his blue workman's overall and carrying his satchel, he was well dressed to play the part. He walked up to the electric light on the far wall, took out the bulb and cleaned the shade. He then fiddled with the switch for a moment or two in a professional manner and finally reassembled the light. After demonstrating that the light now worked perfectly, he bowed to the officers and walked out again on to the platform. To his intense relief his two sentries were three platforms away on the other side of the station and no one else was about. Almost immediately they spotted him and, being unable to cross the line because a goods train was then pulling in, they dived down the subway. He could hear sentries shouting and whistles blowing—there was no time to lose and no time to make plans. He raced down the platform to where a

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number of farm women were removing some cases from a railway wagon. "Anglais—evadeur!" he shouted. The women grasped the situation in a second. They closed in and completely surrounded him. Crouching as low as he could, they all passed down the platform together and out of the station in a little convoy. Once outside, he mingled with civilians and made his way rapidly to the outskirts of the town. Passing half a dozen sentries with all his old cunning, Instone reached the demarcation line for the second time in twelve hours. Here he fell in with two French labourers, and, for a fee of a hundred francs, was conducted across the line without serious difficulty. To make sure he was really over it, he asked a boy the time, there being an hour's difference between German summer-time and the time in unoccupied France. From the boy's answer he knew he was safe. But he was far from free. Although he reached unoccupied France in the last days of September, 1940, he did not see England till April 14th, 1941.

No one can possibly do justice to the incredible conditions of life which, at the end of 1940 and during 1941, existed in the south of France unless he has experienced them himself. Hitler's armies as they advanced through Europe pushed before them a mass of refugees of many nationalities who converged on Marseilles in the hope of escaping by sea.

Towards the end of 1940 escape by boat was nearly impossible and escape via Spain was both difficult and expensive. Though money could buy most things in Marseilles, successful escape was by no means assured even by the most lavish expenditure. To get out of France legitimately, through Spain and Portugal, exit *visas* had to be procured from all three governments, and though much could be done by bribery, the credentials of very few refugees could bear close inspection. In order to escape illegally over the mountains one had to trust oneself to the smugglers (mostly a lot of blood-sucking blackmailers), who alone knew the mountain paths.

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Besides refugees, numerous escapers and evaders from the northern battles had crossed into Vichy France, only to be imprisoned by the French in conditions which gradually increased in severity. To these refugees and escapers must be added an astonishing mixture of spies, agents, deserters and criminals of every description. Marseilles, always notorious as a city of intrigue and wickedness, was now more than worthy of its reputation.

Instone, ever on the outlook for a chance to escape, plunged into this whirl of underground intrigue and eventually found himself locked up in Fort St. Jean with most of the British escapers. Owing to his now fluent French, he acted as camp interpreter. Here he met Treacy once more, and together they took part in one daring but unsuccessful attempt to escape which is worth recording. When Instone arrived at Fort St. Jean he found details for the escape arranged, and he was invited, for old acquaintance sake, to join the party. A schooner had been bought and secretly provisioned with bread and water sufficient for two or three days at sea. The plan, which was to sail back to England with about a hundred British soldiers on board, was surely the most ambitious escaping plan ever conceived. Elaborate arrangements had had to be made for the actual escape from the Fort of so large a number of men. The escapers were divided into parties of ten, each under an N.C.O., an interval of ten minutes being allowed between the departure of each party. On the night, the escapers made their way successfully through the town and the docks to the agreed meeting-place where all was in readiness. Most unfortunately that night a strong Mistral blew which made the scheme quite impracticable. After spending many hours cramped in a boathouse longing for the wind to drop, the escape was finally abandoned and all returned into the fort undetected. This sad result after so much detailed and successful planning, caused the greatest disappointment and depression among the prisoners of St. Jean. But this did not last for long. Treacy found other means

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of escaping, and Instone decided to join up with others and attempt the dangerous and difficult winter crossing of the Pyrénées into (so-called) neutral Spain.

By giving their parole the British in the fort were allowed special privileges and considerable freedom to come and go as they wished—the French caring very little if the prisoners made use of these opportunities to prepare escapes. Later, after a German mission had inspected the camp, conditions became more rigid. On December 25th Instone handed in his parole to the French commandant, saying that he intended to escape and therefore no longer wished for special privileges. The commandant expressed considerable surprise, remarking that he could not understand the mentality of the British who attached so much importance to the letter of a contract and went to the trouble of handing in a small piece of paper before escaping.

After two false starts, caused by a heavy fall of snow (it was the worst winter for forty years) and by a hitch in getting the necessary money, the party left Fort St. Jean on December 28th, 1940. The men involved in this escape were C.Q.M.S. David Lepper of the 2nd/5th West Yorkshire Regiment; C.Q.M.S. McLearn of the South Wales Borderers; Sergeant Jackson, R.A.S.C., of the 57th Division; Sgt.-Observer R. W. Lonsdale of 107 Squadron, R.A.F.; Sgt. J. H. Wyatt of 49 Squadron, R.A.F.—six men, including Instone. The plan was to cross the relatively low foothills at the eastern end of the Pyrénées and reach the British Consulate at Barcelona without being arrested by the Spanish police. Leaving by train, they reached Perpignan, twenty-five miles from the frontier, with comparative ease, and there they picked up their French guide. The guide was a deserter from the French army and, being wanted by the police, was as keen as any of the others to escape successfully from France. As a further inducement he was promised a thousand francs when the party reached Barcelona. At Perpignan they hired a taxi—for three hundred francs—to make the journey to within a mile or two of the frontier.

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From there they proceeded on foot up the mountain, walking through the vineyards in Indian file. After five or six hours of arduous climbing they reached the summit, 3,000 feet above the sea. It was a fine clear day, but so bitterly cold that to find water they had to break several inches of ice on the mountain streams. On their left they could now look down on the village of Port Bou and the blue Mediterranean beyond. By 8 p.m. that evening, having evaded the French and Spanish patrols, they began the descent into Spain. Here they lost their way, for the guide knew the mountain paths no better than they did. It was too cold to wait for daylight and food was running short, so, after a council of war, they decided, although desperately tired, to make directly for Figueras in the hopes of getting a train from there to Barcelona. With tempers somewhat frayed they struggled on, each man finding his own path as best he could. Soon afterwards David Lepper's leg, which had been injured some months previously by a kick from a German sentry, gave out and he fell exhausted. Instone, who seems to have been the strongest of the party, supported him down the mountainside. At the first village they came to Instone asked the way from a Spanish priest, who, most fortunately, taking them for Frenchmen, did not report them to the Spanish police. Later they exchanged a packet of cigarettes for a bottle of wine and slept that night in a haystack. At dawn next day they set off again. In Carat, a small village five miles north of Figueras, a motorbus passed them and stopped two hundred yards ahead. Four Spanish civil guards armed with rifles sprang out. These police, with their grey uniforms, yellow equipment, and black three-cornered patent leather hats, were the last people the escapers wished to see. The guide melted away rapidly into the long grass at the side of the road, but the others were arrested and marched back to the village through which they had just passed. Here they were searched, their knives confiscated and told they would be taken to Figueras that afternoon. They stated

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immediately that they were British escaped prisoners of war and claimed the right to repatriation from a neutral country according to international law. No notice whatever was taken of these pleas. They were marched to Figueras under heavy guard, where, twice more, they were searched—particulars, rank, name and number being taken—and were finally thrown into a cell about twelve feet square. In this cell there were already about twenty prisoners, including ten soldiers who had previously escaped from Fort St. Jean. There was insufficient room in the cell even to lie down on the floor. Here they spent ten wearisome days under appalling conditions.

The food consisted of two hundred grammes of bread a day (two small rolls) and a plate of beans for breakfast, boiled potatoes for lunch, and wet boiled rice for supper. Cigarettes could be bought from the guard for a shilling each. Guards, none of whom were more than sixteen or seventeen years old, wore gym shoes, a blanket over their shoulders for a coat and carried Belgian rifles and Russian steel helmets. The only window in the cell was bricked up leaving a six-inch aperture and as it was mid-winter long hours were spent in total darkness, though occasionally they were able to buy a candle from their guards. For all natural functions a pail was placed in the middle of the cell and removed only once in twenty-four hours. This made the atmosphere of the cell so foul that many of the prisoners were violently sick. At night they huddled together for warmth on the damp stone floor without straw or blankets.

Such was the treatment meted out by the neutral Spaniards to escaping prisoners of war. Eventually they got in touch with the British Vice-Consul at Gerona, who made vain attempts to see the prisoners. He sent in stores to them, but these were stolen by the guards. In spite of such conditions, depressing beyond belief, the cheerfulness and morale of the prisoners remained marvellously good, and, from the example set by the British, prisoners of other nationalities took courage.

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On the eleventh day Instone's party were marched out of the fort with a hundred Spanish political prisoners.

To the amazement of the guards, who thought the treatment during the past week was severe enough to demoralise anyone, the British marched two miles to Figueras station singing at the top of their voices. There they were crowded into cattle trucks and arrived at Barcelona at midnight; they were then separated from the political prisoners and marched through the town to another station, where they were entrained for Cervera and eventually locked up in Cervera gaol. Here the conditions were, if anything, worse than at Figueras. The cell was six feet by eight and the only means of sanitation was the usual bucket. Two verminous and filthy blankets were given to each prisoner and the food rations were much reduced. The only hope of maintaining strength—or even life—was to pool all valuables and to purchase at exorbitant prices extra food from the guards. In this way Instone sold his gold watch for thirty pesetas, for which he got one packet of cigarettes and four small rolls of bread. In the cell everyone grew beards and suffered their first experience of lice. Nothing is more demoralising (as I can vouch from my own experience) than the realisation that one is lousy and that nothing but a modern delousing machine can rid one of these obscene pests.

For a fortnight Instone and his party lived in these dreadful conditions, being allowed out of the cell for exercise each day for a quarter of an hour only. Eventually they were moved in cattle trucks to Seragorra gaol, where once more they were stripped and searched. Through all these searches Instone managed to smuggle the remains of his money and certain important photographs which he had taken at Marseilles, hiding them sometimes in his socks or, as he did at Serragorra, in a faked bandage on his arm. On entering Seragorra gaol all prisoners were forced to cry "Viva Franco" and give the Facist salute. One British soldier who refused to

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comply with these orders was knocked down by the sentries, and lay with blood pouring from his mouth and nose. The Saragorra prison, as was usual with prisons in Spain, was desperately overcrowded and it was hard to find room to lie down.

Next day, chained by the wrist in pairs, the British prisoners were pushed into lorries and taken down to the station, and in due course reached the celebrated concentration camp of Miranda del Ebro. The very name strikes an ugly note in the ears of any prisoner who has passed through Spain. The concentration camp was situated about fifty miles south of Bilbao, up in the Miranda mountains, 2,000 feet above sea level. When Instone and his party first arrived it contained some fifty Polish officers and 250 Polish N.C.O.s and men; sixty Belgians, thirty-five Frenchmen; fifty British soldiers and various others, including twenty German deserters. There were in this camp representatives of nearly every European nation. Altogether, including 500 Spanish political prisoners, there were about a thousand miserable inmates. The conditions in this foul and overcrowded camp were as bad as any prison in Spain. The food was utterly insufficient to maintain strength, and the prisoners sold all their possessions, including their clothes, for extra food. Every man there was covered with lice and nearly everyone had dysentery and scabies. Each morning and evening a long column of prisoners were marched to the parade-ground, where they were compelled to shout in unison "Una, Grande, Libre," "Arrita Espana," "Viva Espana," and were flogged if they refused. In view of the lousy condition of the prisoners, their heads were shaved. The British Embassy at Madrid did their best to alleviate the condition of the British in this dreadful camp, but during the first two years of the war, whilst Franco was still confident that the Germans would win, there was little that the Embassy could do—for their hands were tied by the weakness of the British position.

Instone and his companions remained at Miranda for



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nearly four months, suffering from disease and gradually wasting away. During these months his weight fell from eleven and a half stone to eight stone. He became like all others who had long been in the camp—a living skeleton.

I pray that the treatment of our prisoners, who by International Law should have been immediately repatriated, will not be forgotten. When the time comes it will be unpardonable if we allow those responsible for such atrocities to escape punishment.

Over the final escape from Miranda it is still wiser to draw a veil. My readers will miss but little if the details are not told here, for the story is not particularly interesting. Suffice to say that the whole of Instone's party reached Gibraltar on March 12th, 1941, and that Instone himself celebrated the event by eating fourteen sausages and six eggs with infinite relish before retiring to bed. After this astonishing effort he felt he could die happy, though, strangely enough, he suffered no ill effects. Unfortunately, we have not all got constitutions like Instone, whom we must now leave to make his way back to England without further record here.

## V

### Escape of Wing-Commander Basil Embry

ON May 27th, 1940, W./C. (now Air Vice-Marshal) Embry baled out of his Blenheim from about 4,000 feet and descended into an orchard near St. Omer. He was unhurt except for a piece of shell which had lodged in the fleshy part of his leg. At first this wound gave him little trouble, and I do not think he ever asked the Germans for medical attention. Many Germans were in and around the orchard, so there was no chance of evasion, and he was soon in their hands. Once they

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learned his rank he was treated with becoming dignity, and in due course was transported in General Guderian's own staff car to the German H.Q. Here he was put in charge of a young staff officer who spoke excellent English and was responsible for Embry's safe retention. It was also this officer's job to extract as much military information from his guest as could be obtained by tactful means.

That evening they had dinner together, and over a bottle of wine swapped lies till midnight. Embry at any rate drew freely on an extensive imagination and doubtless the German did the same. The rather tough examination of prisoners which was usual in the latter part of the war was not then part of the German system. Embry had a particularly nimble brain, so it is more than probable that he deceived the Germans on many points and gave nothing away.

Next day, after an uncomfortable night in a stable, Embry was removed from headquarters in a staff car—decanted from this into a lorry and finally arrived at a dirty prisoner-of-war cage walking on his flat feet in the pouring rain. Conditions in all German concentration camps in those days were much the same, for it is probable that the Germans never anticipated capturing so many prisoners, particularly French prisoners—who were invariably treated far better than the British.

In this camp Embry met F./Lt. Treacy, who had been shot down near Calais a few days before. These two decided to take the first opportunity of escaping together. A couple of days later they found themselves tramping eastwards along the roads of France as members of a long column of prisoners of war. The Irish undoubtedly have a natural gift for this type of adventure, and both Embry and Treacy were Irish. This column of prisoners was particularly well guarded; very little straggling was permitted, and it was noticeable that as the column passed through woods or villages there was always a marked increase in the activity and vigilance of the guards.

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In the German army there is a well-recognised army manual method of guarding columns of prisoners. It was not always used, owing to lack of necessary transport, but in this case it was in full operation. At the head of the column there was a lorry on which was mounted a machine gun and crew, followed at about a hundred and fifty yards interval by other lorries, also with machine guns, and so on, down the column—the tail being brought along and stragglers rounded up by a few troops with rifles and tommy guns. A sidecar combination on which a machine gun was mounted was attached to the column. This man's operational method was to come past the prisoners from behind and then to take up a convenient position from where he could watch the prisoners pass. He would then repeat the manoeuvre. The impression that this made upon a prisoner was of a succession of motor-cyclists passing the column at frequent intervals, though in reality it was always the same man. It must be owned that the above is a remarkably efficient method of guarding prisoners with a minimum of effort.

Embry and Treacy soon came to the conclusion that the best time to make an attempt to escape was when the column was marching on a long, straight road, for that was the only time when the attention of the guards relaxed. The strain of waiting for hours for a chance to escape is, as I know myself, very great. There seems always to be half a chance—never a whole one. The prospective escaper is continually screwing himself up to the necessary pitch and then again relaxing with a simultaneous feeling of relief and disappointment each time he decides that an opportunity is unacceptable.

Treacy and Embry were being marched along one of the poplar-lined roads of France, keyed up to take the first chance that offered, when Embry saw at the side of the road a signpost on which was written his own name—marvellous to relate, there was a village called Embry. He instantly decided that this was his cue, and without hesitation dived out of the column and lay still in the

## Escape of Wing-Commander Basil Embry

ditch at the side of the road. Cover was of the poorest and he was exposed to view, but no one had seen him go. Dead men at the side of the road are not an uncommon sight, so the column moved on and left him lying there unnoticed.

Treacy told me that Embry dived from the column like a shot out of a gun and left him "all standing." It was perhaps just as well that both of them did not attempt to escape at the same moment, for if they had done so they could have hardly avoided being seen.

A few hundred yards farther on Treacy also escaped. He and Embry took totally different paths, and in fact never saw each other again till they met some months later as free men once more in the Royal Air Force in England.

Meanwhile, Embry lay in an uncomfortable and exposed position by the main road on which there was a considerable amount of German traffic. The only cover he could see was a wood some three hundred yards away across a field. He determined to make an attempt to reach the wood. In the field was an old woman milking a cow and it now appeared that she alone had seen his escape from the column, for she looked towards him as he started to crawl, and then signalled to him with her hand when he should move forward and when he should lie still. Thus, by slow degrees and largely owing to the courageous help of this old woman, he edged himself across the field till at last he reached the cover of the wood.

The next ten days were pretty grim. That part of the country where he found himself was infested with Germans ; they seemed to be in every farm-house and almost in every wood, and the peasants and small farmers were usually too frightened to give help. He found great difficulty in getting food and reasonable civilian clothes, without which it was impossible to move about in the day-time. At last he acquired a pair of blue trousers from a farmer and took an old coat off a scarecrow and, thus equipped, made better progress. During these

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ten days Embry seldom entered a house. The weather was often wet, and to add to his troubles he was in great pain from the wound in his leg. As there was no chance of any proper medical assistance, he was compelled to operate on his leg with a penknife—a most unpleasant and painful experience which exhausted him so much that he lay up for two days in a wet wood, trying to recover his strength and almost unable to move. There is no doubt that Embry must have been exceptionally tough to have survived those ten days. Starving, wet through continually, with a painful wound, alone in a country crawling with Germans, his position was pretty desperate.

Many men—even good escapers—would I think, have surrendered under such conditions; for there comes a time when the body, its resistance reduced by starvation and exposure, affects the mind and reduces the strength of the will. Gradually, imperceptibly, the fear of death and particularly a lonely death, overcomes the desire for freedom. This does not necessarily lead to surrender but the arguments in favour of it become gradually stronger as the body grows weaker. That at any rate was my own experience, but I have no idea whether Embry ever contemplated giving himself up—it may be he never even wavered in his determination.

Whatever were his thoughts during those desperate days, we find him about a fortnight after his escape from the column, walking south along the roads of France, clad in blue trousers and scare-crow coat, and apparently completely recovered.

Embry's normal appearance is not such as would mark him as particularly British. On the contrary, in non-British clothes he would pass easily as a native in almost any part of the continent of Europe.

He is about 5 feet 8 inches in height, with a well-knit frame and square, powerful shoulders. He is very dark, with thick black hair and a complexion to match. A notable feature are his eyes which are blue and singularly bright and he has the habit of fixing anyone to

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whom he speaks with a penetrating and, until you are used to it—an almost embarrassing gaze. In the nondescript clothing such as he wore on his walk through France, he would pass naturally as a bombed-out refugee (of which numbers were wandering about), without arousing the least suspicion, and this was the rôle he adopted.

From time to time he was stopped by German controls and asked for his papers, but for the most part these incidents presented no serious difficulties to an unusually intelligent man whose appearance was in his favour. When questioned he would throw up his arms and in passable French, give a harrowing if incoherent description of the destruction of his village by German bombs. "No, he had no papers—they had all been blown up together with his wife and family . . . and now he was hunting for his old mother who had last been heard of in this district."

Some such story as this—varied to taste—passed muster without much difficulty. There were so many refugees with true stories somewhat resembling the above, that it was impossible, in the still hopelessly disorganised state of France, for the normal German, untrained in counter-espionage, to distinguish the false from the true.

One day he was passing through a village in his usual inconspicuous way when he heard behind him the ringing footsteps of three men marching in step. He stood aside to let them pass. To his dismay, he realised instantly that the men were British tommies, dressed, it is true, in civilian clothes, but marching straight to captivity. He took the great risk of stopping them and giving them some sane advice, but unfortunately they had already drawn suspicion upon themselves. A few minutes later, Embry and the three soldiers were arrested and separated from each other. Embry was brought before a German officer to whom he explained as usual, that he was a Belgian refugee.

To his horror the German, who turned out to be an interpreter, addressed him in fluent and seemingly perfect

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French without, as yet showing any signs of disbelief. Embry felt that this could not continue, and in order to cover his own poor French, quickly explained that his native tongue was Flemish. The interpreter instantly addressed him in Flemish, of which language Embry knew not one single word.

The situation was desperate, because once caught telling lies, a closer and probably fatal examination would surely follow.

"Hush," said Embry, taking the interpreter aside, "I must confess I have not been telling the truth. I am a Gael."

"A Gael? What's that? I've never heard of one," answered the astonished interpreter. "Where do they come from?"

"From Southern Ireland," said Embry, inventing rapidly.

"Well, that's interesting. But what are you doing here?"

"Hush, I'm running away from the London Police. I have been in England, blowing up pillar boxes and the police are on my track."

"Grand fellow," said the interpreter patting him on the back enthusiastically. "Good luck to your great work. You talk Gaelic, of course?" he added, as a slight suspicion entered his mind.

"Naturally," said Embry, "it is my native tongue."

"Well, say something in Gaelic then," the interpreter told him.

Without hesitation Embry proceeded to let off the few sentences in Urdu which he knew by heart as the result of a sojourn in the East.

"Good," said the interpreter, "that's Gaelic. I speak a little myself."

To his great surprise, Embry found himself once more free to continue his journey towards Paris. He had extricated himself from a nasty situation by his own quick wit and the natural gullibility common to nearly

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all Germans ; for surely there can be no people in the world so easily bluffed. The prisoners of the last war quickly learnt this, and made full use of it ; in this war, from all accounts, I believe the Germans have proved themselves to be even stupider and more gullible than they were thirty years ago. There are innumerable and incredible instances of this, some of them told in this book.

During his walk through France, some of the time in company with the advancing German troops, Embry made fullest use of his eyes and his memory. He went out of his way to lie up beside aerodromes and noted their methods of organisation for defence and dispersal. He saw their columns bombed on the roads and saw how our plan of attack could be improved, so that on his return, he was able to put in a report giving detailed information of the German habits and recommendations for improvements in our methods of attack.

One could only wish that all escapers had used their opportunities as well as he did.

The story of Embry's adventures and contacts as he walked through France does not differ greatly from that of many other evaders. He seems to have passed through a country infested with Germans with little difficulty, and it was an ill chance that landed him once more in the hands of the enemy. He had just swum the Somme and was crossing a field when, in the dark, he ran straight into a number of German soldiers. He was instantly collared and beaten up, and finally, after a most unpleasant and painful experience, was taken before a German officer to whom he told his usual—and now familiar—tale. The German made the following answer.

“ I don't believe a word of what you say. I think you are a British officer trying to escape. You are in civilian clothes so that, if you are what I think you are, you will be shot as a spy to-morrow.”

After these discouraging remarks, Embry was led away to a large farm-house which proved to be a German H.Q. This farm was of the normal type to be found



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everywhere in northern France. The building formed three sides of a square and the fourth side consisted of a wall in which was the main gate. In the middle of the court-yard was an enormous manure heap on which ducks, chickens and pigs roamed at will. About mid-day, Embry was deposited in a small room, normally used for storage purposes. A sentry was placed over the door and a second sentry stood in the courtyard outside the only exit.

After carefully considering his position, Embry came to the conclusion that his chances of being shot the following morning were distinctly promising; for the possibility of passing successfully through an interrogation made by a competent man who spoke French well, was almost nil. His story would be exposed as a lie, and with the German suspicions aroused, he could think of no other story likely to hold water. He could talk no other language but English sufficiently well to pass as a native. He had been caught in the German lines dressed in civilian clothes, so he could see no good reason why he should not be shot as a spy. (In actual fact, the Geneva Convention lays down that the question of whether a man is a spy or not is a question of fact which must be proved against a prisoner before he can be legitimately shot). Many airmen have baled out over German occupied territory in this war, have changed into civilian clothes and have subsequently been caught by the Germans; but none, as far as I know, have been shot as a spy merely for being in civilian clothes. However, the Germans were often in doubt on this matter, and from time to time posted up notices threatening to shoot all combatants found out of uniform, but never carried out this threat. In acting thus, I have always thought that the Germans behaved with a leniency and moderation which is frankly surprising, considering the depths to which they descended in shooting and torturing the unfortunate natives who gave assistance to our evaders. All this Embry could not have known at the time, but I am inclined to agree with his view that

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in his particular circumstances he was unlikely to receive the benefit of any doubt.

Having come to the conclusion that his position was really desperate, Embry was the last man to take it lying down.

He asked his sentry for a glass of water and when he returned with it, hit him as hard as he could on the point of the jaw. He took the rifle and having made sure that this sentry was "out" in a satisfactory manner, he advanced cautiously down the passage. Just outside the exit into the court-yard was a second sentry with his back towards him. As Embry came out, the man turned and at that moment Embry hit him with his full force on the side of the head with the butt of the rifle. His head caved in, and Embry rushed along the side of the building towards the gate, clutching the rifle. There was no one about in the court-yard. Just as he came to a passage between the two buildings, a German soldier came round the corner carrying two buckets of water, and stood for a second, a look of intense astonishment on his face. Embry hit him, too, in the same manner and with the same result, and then, there being nothing else for it, dived into the manure heap and dug a passage for himself through the straw and well into the muck. It was not long before the hue and cry started, but no one thought of the manure heap—perhaps no one thought it possible that a man could live in it.

Many hours later, during the night, he crawled out of the manure and got out of the court-yard without being observed—heaven knows how he did it. Once more he was on the roads of France, making his way toward Paris in close company with the German army, also marching in the same direction. One cannot help imagining that he smelt strongly of manure.

A few days later he found an old bicycle shop full of odds and ends and bits of bicycles. After two days hard work, he constructed a bicycle out of odd pieces and on it made much more rapid progress until the bicycle was

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commandeered from him by a German soldier. At this time his wounded leg began to swell up and give him great pain. Nevertheless he finished the journey to Paris on foot. Paris was full of German troops, but Embry passed inconspicuously, a dirty, ragged, limping figure, through the streets. For some reason he had great difficulty in finding the American Embassy. When at last he succeeded in finding it, he put on a slight American accent and attempted to pass himself off as a citizen of the U.S.A. who had been bombed-out and overwhelmed by the advancing German armies. He was interviewed by a sharp young American girl who mistrusted either his accent or his story and accused him without hesitation of being a British officer in disguise. When he confessed the truth, he was told that it was not in the power of the Embassy to give him much help. He was lent a few hundred francs with the advice to apply to the Salvation Army H.Q. His subsequent adventures in Paris are complicated and obscure. For several days he was locked up in a barred cage under stinking conditions, with all the riff-raff of the criminal underworld. For many days he walked the streets disclosing his identity to prosperous-looking Frenchmen and borrowing money from them. He also entered shops and asked them to lend him money. Money was a necessity, either for purposes of bribery or to enable him to obtain a bicycle.

At last, after a terrible time in Paris he, by some means, got hold of a bicycle and in one day rode to the neighbourhood of Tours—a distance of 145 miles. As an athletic feat this was a truly remarkable performance, because his leg, now swollen to double its normal size, was giving him great pain. At Limoges he was given help by some French officers, but by now his leg was so bad he could hardly walk. He went into hospital for a few days, but dared not stay, because the Germans might arrive in the town at any time, so with French help he went on, in spite of his condition, to Toulouse and thence to Marseilles.

With a special pass obtained from French friends he

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journeyed from Marseilles to a small port on the coast, near Perpignon, where he and two other escapers attempted to steal a boat with the object of reaching Barcelona. They were arrested by the French police and spent the night with the Foreign Legion. By this time his physical condition was really desperate and he began to wonder whether, even if he succeeded in escaping, he would not lose his leg, or possibly his life. When he had reached the very limit of his endurance and was no longer capable of physical exertion, help arrived ; but how that help arrived, even now I am not permitted to tell. Let it suffice that he reached England with unusual speed where, owing to his magnificent constitution, he recovered rapidly. His subsequent exploits in the R.A.F. will, no doubt, be recorded in their right time and place.

\* \* \* \* \*

Embry's escape was a very remarkable effort and must be placed high in order of merit among the great escapes either in this war or in the last. As a mixture of daring and skill, it has rarely been equalled. Other evaders may have matched it in cunning and extricated themselves from even more difficult situations than he did, but I know of no incident in all the history of escaping which quite compares with those fifteen hectic seconds of his break out from the farm-house. It is unique. His physical endurance, too, was astonishing, and there must have been times when only an iron will kept him going. International law forbids a man in civilian clothes from taking a combatant part in the war. It may, therefore, be asked if Embry was justified in killing two or three Germans. There can be no doubt about the answer—he was clearly right from every point of view in what he did. He had been expressly told by a German that if he proved to be a British officer in disguise, he would be shot next morning. He was a man practically under sentence of death and he was being

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guarded by armed sentries. His violent reaction was, therefore, completely justified. Every man has a basic right to fight in defence of his own life, and Embry had more than his own life to defend. He had his own value as a highly experienced officer in the R.A.F. and in addition, valuable information to bring home.

### VI

#### Escape of F./Lt. W. P. F. Treacy

**F**L./LT. TREACY was, without doubt, one of the really great escapers. In his make-up was that mixture of audacity, persistence, skill and sheer love of adventure without which no escaper can be considered to be in the very top class. It seems almost unnecessary to add that he was an Irishman.

On May 27th, 1940, his fighter patrol off Calais sighted three Dornier 17's, two of which were shot down, whilst the third made an attempt to escape inland followed by Treacy.

About 40 miles inside the coast line, Treacy opened fire again, and last saw the Dornier with its port engine on fire, circling slowly to earth. At the same time he noticed a strong smell of glycol coming from his own aircraft and so turned instantly for home. His best chance was to attempt to reach our troops in the Dunkirk district. At first he mistook Calais for Dunkirk and it was not until he was some ten miles from Calais, flying very low, with an engine seizing badly, that he realised his mistake. He turned immediately eastwards, but, as he presented a very easy target for low flak, he was hit repeatedly and forced to twist and turn. This operation finally removed any chance he might have had of reaching our lines to the north, and he had no option but to

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make a "wheels up" landing half a mile south of Gravelines.

He was unhurt himself, but was immediately surrounded by German flak gunners who were very pleased with themselves for a success for which they took the full credit. A sergeant said something to him in German and when Treacy, not understanding, shrugged his shoulders and looked blank, the sergeant walked round behind him and kicked him, and continued to kick him till his officer—who had been watching with an amused smile on his face—told him to desist. Treacy was not the type of man to let little incidents of this sort fade from his memory. Shortly afterwards, a car arrived in which was a German captain and a doctor. The captain produced a slab of Cadbury's chocolate and breaking it into about twenty small pieces, gave one to each of the gunners as a reward.

At the H.Q. of the G.A.F. south of Dunkirk he was questioned by an interpreter, but when he refused to give more than his name, rank and number, the questions were not pressed. In return Treacy was given gratuitously a great deal of information—some of it true, some not—but all of it interesting, for it showed the opinions currently held by the German officers at the moment when total victory was perhaps more apparently within their grasp than at any other time in the war. The Germans, said the interpreter, would be in England in a month. It would not be necessary to force a crossing of the Channel as air attack would be sufficient to compel surrender. When France had been beaten and Paris entered (and that would be soon), the Italians would enter the war. Only the north of France would be occupied by German troops; the south of France would remain free, for Germany had no serious quarrel with France and would only take from her Alsace and Lorraine. (It may be noted that on most points these prophecies were very accurate.)

Why, he asked Treacy, were the British bombers

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dropping bombs and incendiaries on the Ruhr, where there were no military targets? Why did the British wireless continue to broadcast nothing but lies? He simply couldn't understand.

To these and other questions Treacy felt it politic to make no reply. All this took place on the lawn of a big house which had been taken over by the G.A.F. headquarter staff.

With two French officers, for whom the interpreter expressed open contempt, Treacy was removed in a car to Desvres. During the drive a sentry with a sub-machine gun stood with his back to the windscreen, but as it was after 8.30 p.m. when they left the G.A.F. headquarters, Treacy had good hopes of not reaching their destination before dark and so of finding an opportunity to escape. This would almost certainly have happened, since they lost their way, if only the French officers, to Treacy's intense disgust, had not asked obligingly for directions from the natives. The French morale at that time, and more particularly among the officers, was deplorable.

At Desvres their driver had the greatest difficulty in finding anyone who would accept his prisoners. They visited infantry, tank and even G.A.F. units, but all refused to guard them for the night. Finally they were put in an attic with a tiny window at the top of a three-storied house, where they passed a comfortable night. Next day they were taken to Desvres football field, which had been converted into a collecting camp for prisoners of war. There were five to six thousand prisoners in the grounds, most of whom had been captured at Calais; of these about 1,000 were British. The British officers occupied the grand stand, and there Treacy found F./O. Casanova of 92 Squadron. Whilst they were talking a German sentry came up and, telling Treacy by signs that he was to sit down, addressed him at considerable length. The substance of his remarks, kindly translated by a British officer, was: "You English flying pig—you will be made to walk to Berlin and lick the boots of Field-Marshal Hermann Goering."

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At Desvres there were about twenty or thirty guards, half a dozen being trained bullies who did all in their power (apparently part of the German policy) to make life as unpleasant as possible for the prisoners. Most of the men in the camp were utterly worn out and had had no food for five or six days, but all the food they got there was a cupful per day of very thin bean soup with half a cubic inch of horseflesh in it.

About 10 a.m. that morning W./C. Embry was brought into the camp and in the afternoon a column of prisoners which included Treacy and Embry, were marched off in the direction of Hucqueliers, which they reached about seven in the evening. There a priest interceded with the Germans and permission was given to the inhabitants to feed the prisoners. Some good hot soup and boiled potatoes made a great difference to their morale and to their strength.

That night Embry and Treacy discussed the possibility of escape and decided to attempt it next day. All the prisoners were locked into the church. So crowded were they that there was hardly room to lie on the floor ; it had also been pouring with rain and everyone was wet through, so that the unusual sight of a completely nude man asleep on the high altar was easily explained.

In my account of W./C. Embry's escape I have already described the German method of guarding a column of prisoners on the march by means of a lorry with a machine gun on it, every hundred yards or so—a most efficient and economical method.

The column left Huequeliers about 5 a.m., and at mid-day Embry asked Treacy whether he was ready to go. Treacy answered "Yes," so with nerves all taut for the coming attempt which at the best was highly dangerous and at the worst certain death, they marched on, Treacy a pace or two ahead of Embry.

The choice of the exact moment to go was vital. (I have already told how and why Embry made his choice.) When Treacy looked round a few seconds later Embry



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was gone from the column and no one that mattered had seen or heard him go. About a hundred yards farther down the road Treacy threw himself into a ditch at the side of the road and lay under a bush unseen while the column moved by. Whilst the column was still in sight the double escape was discovered by the Germans. Treacy saw the column halt. There was much shouting and running up and down and reforming the lines ; but the guards dared not leave the column in order to make a search, so the column at last moved on again and out of sight. When it was dark Treacy went back to look for Embry, but failed to find him, so, using the stars as a guide, he set off southwards. He choose a southerly direction because he thought it would be easier to cross the enemy lines on the Somme rather than through the besieging forces around Dunkirk. He was dressed in uniform, flying boots, but had no hat.

The adventures of the next five nights and days I will give as nearly as possible in Treacy's own words.

" I had gone about two miles across country and was about to cross a sunken road when, right underneath me, I saw about twenty or thirty motor vehicles drawn up. I skirted round these and continued my way south. Then I came to some houses. When crossing a field near the houses a terrific clamour suddenly broke out. This was caused by three Germans not more than about ten yards away from me. Two were fighting and shouting, punching each other, and the third was trying to keep them quiet by shouting ' Hush ' at the top of his voice. They never saw me at all, and shortly went back to their billets. I continued on south. Soon the sky had begun to cloud over and I could not use the stars. When dawn came and the sun rose I found I had walked in a circle.

" I decided to hide myself in the hay in a barn. The first barn entered was full of Germans, but they did not see me. Eventually I found an empty barn and went to sleep under the hay. I had a couple of biscuits and about ten lumps of sugar. That day a German entered the

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barn with a dog and the dog sniffed the hay about me, but the German called him off. That night I came out and went to the farmhouse which was only a few yards away from the barn. I asked for a glass of water. They gave me milk, chocolate, a loaf of bread and a tin of sardines. I continued south the next night. After about midnight the sky clouded over and again at dawn I found I had walked in a circle. I made my way to another farm and hid myself in a cartload of straw. The farmer found me there and gave me a suit of civilian clothes. This farm was halfway between Campagne les Hesdin and Buire le Sec.

"I lay there all day while German artillery passed, going south towards the Somme. Next night I set off again, going south, and had the same weather—fine to midnight, when it clouded over so that I made very little progress.

"I made my way to a farm and lay there in some loose hay, and next afternoon was found by the farmer's wife. She asked me who I was, and I told her. That night she brought me into the house and gave me food. They kept me there, though the place was entirely surrounded by Germans. I lay there in the loose hay for three days, and every day the Germans came in and took handfuls of it away and every night the farmer and his wife came and put some more back again. Then I moved up into a loft, where I stayed another three days. At this time the Germans left this village to go south. It would then be about June 3rd or 4th."

About this time Treacy joined up with Instone, and the story of their unsuccessful expedition to the coast has already been told. They returned from it depressed and weary, to find that the district had become extremely unsafe for escaping prisoners. During their absence an R.A.F. bomber had been shot down and some of the crew were believed by the Germans to be hiding in the neighbourhood. After an extensive but abortive search in the farms and villages around the Germans collected about

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twenty of the children and threatened to shoot them in the village square if the members of the R.A.F. crew were not delivered up.

A machine-gun was levelled at the children and the whole village turned out to watch. It was a tense and dramatic moment, for there seems no doubt that the villagers fully believed that if they refused to comply the order would be given to fire. Yet they refused, without a dissentient voice.

There are few incidents in all the history of the Resistance movement of greater courage and self-sacrifice.

The German officer at first threatened and blustered, but when he saw that the villagers showed no signs of wavering he changed his tone and almost pleaded that he should not be compelled to carry out his orders. When, in spite of all the threats and pleadings, he was still met with stony silence and looks of hatred, he called the shooting off.

After this incident the German search of the neighbourhood became intensified, so much so that it was unsafe for an escaper to remain even in close hiding. Instone, however, could not easily move. He had hardly recovered from his illness, his legs were swollen and his feet blistered after the last forced march from the coast; furthermore, owing to the excellence of his French, he was in much less danger than Treacy. With many regrets, therefore, these two remarkable men decided to part, so Treacy once more headed southwards.

After three days he reached Crecy, but heard that the Germans were now advancing so rapidly that he could see no hope of overtaking them. Once more he turned towards the coast, for now a boat seemed his only chance. The whole countryside was stiff with German military, and it is a marvel he avoided capture as long as he did.

He reached Buire le Sec once more and there fell in with three soldiers of the Black Watch. All three soldiers had obtained nondescript civilian clothes in which they could pass as refugees. Treacy's civilian clothes were

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far too small for him, the trousers ceasing just below the calf of his leg and the sleeves coming to little below the elbow.

Together they set off for the Bay of Authie and next day explored the coast in broad daylight. They actually found a boat, and then, since the Bay seemed deserted, they lay on the beach, resting and smoking, discussing how to make oars or get material for a sail. Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, they were seen by a German patrol through binoculars. This part of Treacy's story makes one wonder whether he had become disheartened and desperate, for there seems no other explanation of his neglect of the most elementary precautions. In the distance they could see the German cyclist patrol coming down the road towards them ; it was clear the party were going to be investigated. He told his companions to make sure they had no incriminating papers on them, so that when questioned they could pose as bombed-out refugees. It was their only chance, and by no means so hopeless of success as one might suppose. Belgian refugees without papers were common and the German soldiers who could talk any French extremely uncommon.

In due course four German soldiers arrived on bicycles. Treacy told them in a mixture of French and sign language that they were bombed-out natives of Tournai (a town which he knew had been sufficiently destroyed), and added that they had left at the last moment and had neither papers nor possessions. The Germans apparently believed this, but "you may be saboteurs," they said, and searched them. All three men of the Black Watch had their paybooks on them, which not unnaturally raised suspicion in the German mind. On being searched again at Groffliers one of the lads was found to have a photograph of himself in uniform and a kilt, with Aldershot stamped on the back. Even then the Germans were not sure, till one of the Tommies gave the show away by shaking his head in answer to the question, "Are you an English soldier?"

Treacy remained on the doubtful list until an inter-

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preter was found who spoke sufficiently good French to make further bluff impossible.

A few days later Treacy found himself once more in a concentration camp—this time in the Exhibition grounds at Lille. Here he lost no time hunting for an exit. He found a corrugated iron shed which had a hole in the wall backing on to the street. He managed to squeeze through the hole, so that within an hour or so of entering the camp he was free once more. Outside were a number of French people looking for relatives among the many French prisoners of war in the camp. He revealed his identity to one woman, telling her he had just left the camp, and she found him a refuge in a private house where he stayed for five days. When he left he was given a bicycle, an identity card, some money, food, and a map, as well as an address to go to in Fauquesberques. Once more he made his way to the bay of Authie, through a country in which every village was full of Germans. This time he made his reconnaissance of the bay under cover of darkness and after many nights of search he found a boat in the back of a farmyard on the river Authie. He bought it for forty francs. It was three feet wide, six feet long and blunt at both ends. In three days of hard work he made some oars and then on July 13th, with the help of the farmer, launched the boat. There were sentries posed on two of the bridges under which he would have to pass, so he got the farmer to cover the boat with hay and thus, disguised as a haystack, floated down the river.

The river Authie flows into the sea through numerous small channels which, when the tide is out, are shallow and very muddy. Treacy missed the main channel in the dark and had a long and exhausting struggle, lugging and sometimes carrying his heavy boat through the mud, so that it was not till half an hour after dawn, instead of two hours before dawn, that he reached the sea.

It was impossible to wait till night because there was no shelter anywhere, so he decided to start immediately.

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When about a mile out to sea in front of Borck, he heard machine-gun fire and noticed splashes all round him. Two batteries of machine-guns fired steadily at him for half an hour, but no splashes came nearer than five yards, and luckily the range was too great for ricochets. Eventually he rowed out of range. When the Germans realised this they opened fire with four pieces of artillery from the sea front near Borck. Treacy was now nearly two miles out, and for another half-hour they kept firing single shots, the nearest falling about fifty yards away. A bit of his boat above the waterline was shot away but, as this did not render it unserviceable Treacy continued to row. The Germans, seeing this, opened rapid fire for five minutes, till the mist closed down. Treacy rowed on steadily and by midday had reached a point about ten miles west of le Touquet. There he saw two M.E. 120s flying low over the water, obviously looking for him. One of them found him and turned towards him in a shallow dive. Thinking that the M.E. was about to open fire, Treacy dived overboard. When he came up the aircraft was flying low overhead. He saw the rear gunner wave at him, clearly indicating that he should get back into his boat, which was now about fifteen yards away. Treacy boarded his boat again with great difficulty, and then, as the aircraft passed over him again, saw the observer pointing to the shore. Treacy perforce turned his boat and pretended to row landwards. But for every feeble stroke he made in that direction he gave a couple of back thrusts towards England, choosing each time a moment when the position of the aircraft made observation difficult. From time to time, as the M.E. passed over him, the rear gunner fired into the water behind him. This went on for half an hour—very little progress being made in either direction. Suddenly the aircraft flew off. Either they had run out of petrol or had perhaps decided that these operations were futile. Treacy, much relieved though extremely tired, turned the boat and rowed as hard as he could towards England, praying that the mist

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would come down again. It was not long before he was seen by a German seaplane. It landed beside him, picked him off and took him, once more, back to a German prison. The crew of the seaplane were very sore with the R.A.F. because, they said, we had shot down some of their ambulance planes. To this accusation Treacy replied that we had still more reason to be angry because their submarines had sunk our hospital ships. This, of course, they refused to admit, but informed him that the war would be over in three months and that he would be home by Christmas.

The naval authorities at Boulogne were, according to Treacy, "a sarcastic lot of gentlemen." They told him they knew he had been given a book to read on escaping, but unfortunately—as he, Treacy, no doubt now realised—these rules for escaping did not work. When Treacy protested, quite correctly, that he had been given no instructions on escaping, they told him that if he tried any more silly tricks he would be shot without hesitation. Eventually he was taken to Le Touquet, where he was interrogated by the G.A.F., who particularly wanted to know what he was doing in France and how he had got there.

Oblivious or perhaps regardless of the fact that he stood an excellent chance of being shot out of hand as a spy, Treacy spun them a yarn which did not include the fact that he had already been taken prisoner twice before. His interrogators clearly did not believe this story, and said so, but they were very pleased with themselves at capturing him and considered that he had "put up a good show." These pleasantries came to rather an abrupt end when a nasty-looking German, who up to that moment had not spoken, asked Treacy if he could identify himself. Treacy protested that he had no means of doing so. "Then you will be treated as a spy," was the answer.

That night he spent in Le Touquet gaol with two German airmen who had two days' C.B. for sleeping while on duty. Next day, July 15th, Treacy was again interrogated for several hours by the G.A.F. He per-

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suaded them without much difficulty that he knew something about flying, and gave his name, rank and number (the latter inadvertently wrong), but refused to give an account of his movements or to say how long he had been in France. They said they would check up on him by wireless to London.

Considering Treacy's very unconciliatory way of answering questions, it must be owned that the Germans, having decided that he was an English airman, behaved in a fairly reasonable manner. I cannot help wondering whether our authorities would have tolerated so much impudence from a German airman. However, instead of shooting him, they tried to break his morale. He was flung into a cell in which there was practically no light or air. There was no bedstead in the cell and no bedding of any kind. It was completely bare. In one corner there had been a lavatory, but all the lavatory fittings had been removed. In spite of this fact the French prisoners had continued to use it as a lavatory. Further details may be left to the imagination, but it suffices to say that the cell was indescribably filthy and stank abominably. For six days Treacy shared this foul cell with an infantryman from the K.O.Y.L.I. and a private of the Grenadier Guards. On July 20th or 21st all three were removed to Tournai. There they were forced to scrub the floors of the barracks. In spite of this hard treatment, Treacy's morale remained intact; he only loathed the Germans more, and eagerly seized any opportunity for getting his own back. For instance, one day, when Treacy was scrubbing a floor in the barracks, a German electrician on a high ladder was mending a wire in the ceiling. The floor was wet, and it only took a very light touch by Treacy to bring the electrician and the ladder crashing to the floor. Next day he saw the electrician with his arm in a sling. Treacy avoided any blame for this misadventure.

From Tournai they were taken to Renaix, where they spent the night in very dirty cells, and the next morning



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joined forces with about 300 British soldiers from hospital who were going to Lockeran. On arrival there Treacy and three others were put into a small cell in the cloth factory which had been turned into a prison camp. Here they remained three days till they got a chance of complaining to the Red Cross, and by their intervention were allowed out into the main camp. The Germans, however, took away their civilian clothes and forced them to wear Belgian uniforms. Fortunately they neglected to look into the two bags which Treacy was carrying, one of which contained a second suit of civilian clothes. I regret that I have never "cleared up" this extraordinary incident, told me by Treacy himself. How could he, in the circumstances in which he had been living, have acquired two bags (one packed with civilian clothes), and having miraculously obtained them, how could he have passed them through a whole series of interrogations and cells unsearched? It is an unsolved mystery.

Amongst the British officers in the camp were two doctors, who, when they heard of Treacy's past adventures, produced from their kits a compass and a map of Belgium, which they generously gave him.

For a fortnight or more before coming to this camp Treacy had been kept on very short rations, and in the camp the food was nothing like sufficient. One loaf of bread between four men, some ersatz coffee, and a small cup of rice or peas was all they had. Treacy, though desperately hungry, was not yet seriously weak from lack of food.

As some prisoners of war had previously escaped from Lokeran, the guards had lately been doubled, but instead of doubling the number of posts they had doubled the guard at each one with the result that the sentries, having friends to talk to, were even less dangerous to an escaper than they had been before.

Treacy's plan of escape was bold but simple. One of the rooms had a domed glass roof with iron girders beneath it. When the German sergeant in charge of the camp called for "lights out," two or three of the

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British officers, on the pretence of going out to the lavatory, got into this room and hoisted him up so that he could grip the girders. He pulled himself up, and then, by smashing one of the panes, got on to the roof of the building. It was a dark night, but nevertheless on the roof he was terribly exposed. He made his way with infinite caution to the edge of the flat roof and finally dropped to the ground without being heard or seen. From there he climbed a wall and found himself in the garden of a convent.

All this had not only required great skill, but also more than a fair share of luck. The sentries were mostly older men who had been prisoners in England during the last war. Rather unexpectedly they showed little enthusiasm for their work. In the convent garden Treacy changed into civilian clothes, and leaving there without much difficulty, crossed the Escaut at 5 a.m. by means of a ferry (the bridge having been blown up). He kept going southwards for the next two days and nights, and eventually, worn out by hunger and fatigue, he was taken in and cared for by a Belgian in the district of Cysoing. Here he lay up for a week, gradually recovering his strength.

During the following eight weeks he stayed with a French family in the neighbourhood of Bouveries. He felt the hopelessness of trying to reach the north coast again, and as yet he knew too little of the conditions in southern France. Where he was—working as a peasant on the land—he seemed fairly safe from capture.

At that time some very curious rumours were whispered through France, based, as far as I know, on no foundation at all. Nearly all escapers in France were told by the peasants that in a few days aeroplanes from England would land and rescue them. Very often the "rendez-vous" with the aeroplane was given in great detail, but usually the information was vague. Many escapers waited anxiously for days and were then told that the coming of the planes had been postponed. Again and again this happened. There is no question that those

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who passed on the rumours fully believed them to be correct. But who started the rumours, and with what object, no one has yet found out. Treacy was warned many times to be ready to leave by plane and his decision to remain on the farm was partly due to the feeling that if a miraculous method of escaping by aeroplane had been "laid on" he would be a fool to leave the district.

At last, bronzed and well from working on the land, he determined to go south across the line of demarcation to unoccupied France, where there were fewer Germans and where he might reasonably expect help from the inhabitants. On October 16th he crossed the line of demarcation between St. Julien and Martin le Riviere without difficulty. It so happened that the German regiment, who were supposed to be guarding that part of the line, had lately come from Norway, and as a result of their experiences there they were terrified of being murdered. The regiment insisted upon camping out at night in the woods so that Treacy's task was, with the guidance of the villagers, very easy. To his surprise he found the French in Free France most unfriendly, but, after many complicated adventures, made his way via Limoges to Marseilles, where he was arrested and interned in Fort St. Jean.

His final escape after many attempts had a grand simplicity about it which has the mark of true genius. It occurred to him one day that he was an Irishman, a native of Eire, and therefore neutral. He was clearly a poor student of Dublin University (where in fact he had studied) who had been caught up in the maelstrom of a European war and stranded without papers on the beaches of Marseilles. Here he had been frequently arrested by the French under the suspicion that he had taken part in the war. His situation was desperate. With roughly these thoughts in his mind, he wrote a piteous letter to the Eire consul at Vichy and was delighted when in return he received an Irish passport. This was almost too good to be true. Treacy, if he was

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undertaking a bluff, never did it by halves. He travelled to Vichy with the passport, saw the necessary authorities, got an exit *visa*, and finally travelled *de luxe* to Lisbon via Narbonne, Barcelona and Madrid. He left Lisbon by air and reached Barnstaple on January 30th after a series of escaping adventures which, in my belief, are without parallel in this war or the last.

\* \* \* \* \*

Soon after his return to England F./Lt. Treacy was promoted to Squadron Leader and was placed in command of a fighter squadron in active operations against the enemy. He himself shot down at least one more German fighter before he was, to the great sorrow of his many friends and admirers, killed in an accident. Two planes collided over the Thames Estuary and his body was never found.

This short account of his escapes is a small tribute to his memory.

### FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT TREACY.

By LT.-COL. LANGLEY.

I first met Treacy during the month of November, 1940, in Marseilles. He had only just arrived from the Occupied Zone and was interned, together with a number of other officers in Fort Jean.

His name was not unknown to me, since while in hospital at Lille we had heard through the medium of one of our *padres* that Treacy had been shot by the Germans in the prison at Loos. Since the *padre* had declared he had actually seen the execution, I was naturally somewhat surprised to see Treacy. He informed me that the misunderstanding had come about in this way. While in the prison he had been allowed some exercise on a small yard and the *padre* had arrived to visit him at a time when he was lounging at one end of the yard while a number of German soldiers

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were being drilled at the other end. The *padre*, not understanding a word of German, immediately assumed that he was witnessing an execution, and not wishing to see Treacy actually shot he retired and reported the fact to the inmates of the hospital.

At this time, in view of my wounds, I obtained permission from the French authorities to live in an hotel. This was most satisfactory from the point of view of escaping, and Treacy decided that he would absent himself from the camp and join me at this hotel. For some days everything went well, Treacy and I sharing a large double bed at night and passing the day planning escapes. Unfortunately, however, the proprietor of the hotel got wind of what was happening, and used to visit my room at various intervals during the night to ensure himself that I was alone. During these visits Treacy used to hide himself under the bed, but as this was extremely low and Treacy a very large man, the noise he made getting there soon betrayed our plans and he was forced to remove himself to a small room on the top floor of a hotel in the Vieille Port.

I am not quite certain how he managed to arrange to have a room, but I believe he persuaded the proprietor that he was a refugee Irish priest from the Occupied Zone who had lost all his papers. During the months of November and December we worked together on numerous schemes. The first and perhaps the most amusing was one to obtain Jugoslavian passports, with a view to crossing into Spain as Jugoslavian commercial travellers. We both considered it unlikely that anyone on the Spanish frontier would speak any of the language of Jugoslavia, but in order to make absolutely certain we spent several days learning, I think it was, Serbian phrases.

The passports were to be made out on the name of Tracovitch and Langovitch and were guaranteed to be genuine. This scheme finally broke down, due to the ever-increasing price demanded by our contact at Vichy. Originally we had agreed to pay 2,000 French francs on

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delivery of the passports and another 1,000 francs to a Spaniard at Barcelona. However, the price rose steadily and the passports were not produced, so that we were forced to abandon what appeared to be a very good plan.

Our next effort was an attempt to get away by sea in conjunction with a number of somewhat doubtful Frenchmen and a Spaniard who claimed to have commanded the International Brigade at the famous battle outside Madrid, where an entire Italian armoured division was wiped out. Failure here was due mostly to the immense difficulties in obtaining petrol for the boat in question. Both Treacy and I inspected the yacht, and I am certain had we succeeded in obtaining the petrol we should have had little or no difficulty in getting clear of the harbour under cover of darkness and in reaching a Spanish port.

Our third and last joint scheme was to be smuggled on board one of the ships going to Beirut from where we considered the chance of reaching Palestine to be good. The originator of this scheme was a Frenchman who stated he was working for the British and who would come with us, provide the necessary money, arrange the hiding-place on the boat, etc., on condition that we guaranteed his immediate return to England on contacting the British authorities in Palestine. Neither Treacy nor myself believed there was a word of truth in this, since at least half of the population of Marseilles claimed that they were working for the Allies. However, the hiding-place chosen was the ship's refrigerator, since it was never searched, and it was the only place where it was believed we should be protected from the tear gas which the Germans and Italians were popularly believed to use in order to rout out stowaways in the more inaccessible parts of the ships proceeding to North Africa, Syria, etc.

It was considered an even chance as to whether we should be able to survive the intense cold in the refrigerator, but by now we were both so bored that we were prepared to take the risk. Everything had been arranged, and we went to a final rendezvous at a small

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café when the Frenchmen told us he was no longer able to come with us, having received orders to proceed immediately to Paris, to contact other people working for the British. However, in order not to let us down he had informed his contacts of the boat, etc., that we should still be coming and handed each of us a packet which contained 10,000 francs, a revolver and ammunition. Both of us were convinced that this was a "plant" and that we should be arrested the moment we boarded the ship, and be condemned for a long period of imprisonment for having carried arms while internees in a neutral country. The Frenchman spent the best part of the night trying to persuade us that the whole affair was genuine, but without success, and we left, congratulating ourselves on having escaped from the trap.

(Four years later, in London, I was accosted by the Frenchman in question, and to my intense surprise learned that every word he had spoken was the truth. I asked him why he had given us revolvers, and he stated that he felt that without arms we should have had little or no chance of making our way from Beirut to Palestine.)

After this Treacy decided to push ahead with his individual scheme of obtaining an Irish passport, and by this means travelling to Spain. He intended to pose in front of both French and Spanish authorities as a student from Dunkirk who had had to leave due to the war, and now wished to return to Ireland. In order to pass what he felt would be a searching cross-examination on Dunkirk and his life there he enlisted the aid of a French merchant seaman who had spent a large period in this port, and he spent hours learning the names of cafés and streets, etc.

In addition to this he procured a book giving the names of the schools in Dunkirk, together with those of the masters. At the end of a fortnight there was very little he did not know about Dunkirk, and if required he was even able to produce a few racy stories about some of its inhabitants. It was as well that he had taken all these

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precautions because he was interrogated at the Marseilles Town Hall by a Frenchman who had lived in the town for twenty-five years and who claimed to be a personal friend of the headmaster of the school on which Treacy had picked. He, Treacy, had considerable difficulty in clearing this fence as the Frenchman pressed him for details of the headmaster's life. However, he got away with it by stating that as a mere pupil he was not intimate with the headmaster !

One of my last memories of Marseilles is of Treacy standing on the platform of the station waving good-bye. He was dressed in a black overcoat with a large moth-eaten astrakhan collar, holding in his right hand an equally moth-eaten umbrella. He had won this coat in a raffle and was very proud of it. He told me later that he travelled the whole way back to England in it, and that it caused no little comment on his arrival at a London station.

I shall always regard him as one of the greatest characters I have met, and his adventures while escaping are some of the greatest of this war.

## VII

### Escape of Hauptman von Werra

AS a race the Germans are not good escapers—they don't seem to have the right outlook. As far as I know only one German escaped from England in the last war. His name was Pushtow, and he wrote a book, which was translated, called "My Escape from Donnington Hall." As a psychological essay it is interesting but the true escaper will find it an irritating account of haphazard adventures written from entirely the wrong angle. In the book there is an intolerable amount of sentimental wash. Pushtow escaped from a sense of



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duty ; he clearly did not enjoy it a bit, and on reaching the Fatherland one is not surprised to learn that he fell on his knees and kissed the sacred soil.

Now, a sense of duty is usually one of the reasons why a prisoner of war refuses to "stay put," but to the true escaper it never has been and never will be the major reason. The true escaper tries to get away because his natural attitude is "agin the government," and he strongly objects to his liberties being restricted by a lot of bastards whom he despises. He also enjoys the adventure for its own sake, and the fact that considerable risks are attached puts escaping into the same class of amusement as big-game hunting under severe conditions. The rewards of success are very great and the penalties of failure are not excessive.

The Geneva Convention of 1929 was thoughtful enough to lay it down that no prisoner of war might be punished by more than thirty days' solitary confinement for a simple escape. To a young man lately arrived in a prison camp from a pleasant and civilised mess thirty days' solitary often seemed sufficiently severe, but to the hardened prisoner of some years standing it appeared insignificant and was sometimes even looked upon as a welcome relief from overcrowded quarters. Sometimes solitary confinement entailed desperately short rations and no smokes, but in most well-organised British prison camps adequate arrangements were usually devised by which food, literature and tobacco could be conveyed surreptitiously to the inmates of the prison cells. In the Great War very heavy sentences were sometimes imposed on recaptured prisoners, especially if they made a habit of attempting to escape, but in this war, with some notable exceptions, the Germans have obeyed the Geneva rules, and on the whole have imposed lighter sentences than we in England imposed on Germans. A normal sentence on a recaptured English prisoner was five to fifteen days' solitary confinement, whilst our sentences on Germans were more frequently over twenty days.

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For all other crimes, apart from escaping, a prisoner of war is tried and punished under the military laws of the detaining power. Thus if he bashes a sentry on his escape he will be tried by court-martial for assault, or if he kills a sentry or anyone else during an escape he will be tried and certainly condemned for murder. If he steals a German uniform in which to escape he will be tried for theft. If he tunnels through the walls of his prison or cuts the bars, he will be up on a charge of wilful damage to government property. A simple escape is, therefore, not quite so easy to accomplish as some may think, but the Germans, in spite of their passion for courts-martial, acted in general with considerable leniency towards offences committed during escapes, and entered, as far as the German make-up will allow, into the spirit of the thing. They recognised that our prisoners of war considered it their duty to escape, and though the commandants and guards must have had great difficulty in restraining themselves from reprisals on recaptured prisoners, nevertheless they obeyed, with all the humour they could summon, the orders from above. *Befehl ist Befehl*—orders are orders—as the Germans say, and they accepted the maxim both for the prisoners and for themselves. Courts-martial are, however, what the Germans really enjoy—they seem particularly suited to their temperament. The strict rules of procedure, the formalities, the dignities due to rank, the endless forms to fill up and sign, are all part of a well-regulated way of life which they understand and in which they have existed since their earliest days. The courts-martial are usually conducted by quite an unnecessary number of high-ranking officers—in fact they use their courts-martial as a means of giving employment and pay to otherwise useless and inefficient dug-outs. At a German court-martial on a prisoner the proceedings are usually conducted with admirable precision. The evidence is fully sifted. The prisoner is allowed a competent officer to speak in his defence. But the result is invariably the same. The

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prisoner is found guilty and sentenced to a maximum penalty. In cases where a death penalty may be imposed an observer from a neutral country is usually present and shorthand notes of the trial are forwarded to the prisoner's homeland. As a death sentence may not be carried out for three months after judgment, it has, I believe, been often possible for our Foreign Office to put in a special plea through the neutral power, but I do not know whether this has ever been effective.

The love of rule and order is the basic cause of unfitness of most Germans for the very individualistic efforts necessary for a successful escape. It may be thought that an escape from England is so difficult in war-time as to be hardly worth trying. But I am not convinced even of this, for between England and Ireland boats were continually passing. With properly-forged papers and good English, such as any prisoner of war could learn in a year, such an escape should have been possible and would have been accomplished, I feel sure, if our best escapers had been presented with such a problem. But all Germans are not anti-escapists, as will be seen from the story of Von Werra, who must be classed among the great escapers of this war—he had the authentic touch.

Hauptman Von Werra was shot down in the Battle of Britain. He spoke English fluently with a strong foreign accent and from the first was full of bounce and impudence. He had hardly climbed out of his crashed M.E. 109 and been captured by the Home Guard, before he started betting bottles of champagne with anyone who would take him that he would escape from England. He passed in the usual way, still extremely cheeky, to a normal prisoner-of-war camp in England where, I can't help thinking, he must have been a very bad influence from our point of view. In due course, he escaped, but was recaptured after a short, sharp chase. After doing his spell of "solitary," he was returned to camp and a month or so later he escaped again.

Early one morning, soon after he had gained his

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liberty, he was walking along a solitary road in the neighbourhood of Hucknall aerodrome, when the opportunity came to him to put into operation his carefully thought out scheme. Running beside the road was the local railway line, and Von Werra entered a small station at about 6 a.m. and knocked on the station-master's door. He was dressed in a whitish boiler suit, under which he wore his full uniform with his iron cross and all his decorations. He was without a hat. In his fluent but curious English, he told the station-master a remarkable yarn. He was a Dutchman, he said, attached to the Royal Air Force, and the pilot of a Wellington bomber. They had just returned from bombing Denmark and had force-landed over the hills yonder. No, none of them was hurt but as he had secret instruments on board he had left his crew to guard the machine and had come away himself to fetch help. Would the station-master kindly ring up the nearest aerodrome and ask them to send out a transport to fetch him. The matter was urgent. This was a remarkable story and might well have deceived anybody, but the station-master was a canny old Scot and instead of ringing the aerodrome he rang the police. In due course the police arrived but found Von Werra, or Van Lott, as he now called himself, not the least dismayed. He told them the same story with a few embellishments, gave them a graphic description of his passage across the North Sea on one engine, and wound up with a moving peroration on his joy and thankfulness on reaching England once more. The police listened with bated breath to this heroic story and then, I regret to state, swallowed the bait, hook, line, sinker and all. They did ask for his "1250" (identity card), but Van Lott glibly explained that, being a Dutchman with a family in Holland, he was not allowed to carry the 1250 for fear of reprisals on his family. This satisfied the police and they rang up Hucknall aerodrome and asked for transport to be sent, and at the same time more or less guaranteed Van Lott's authenticity.

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In due course, transport arrived and Van Lott departed for Hucknall aerodrome in a R.A.F. van. His build-up as a genuine Dutch pilot was already quite impressive. On arriving at the R.A.F. station, Von Werra had the infernal cheek to ask to see the Commanding Officer. It was then about 7 a.m. and the C.O. being in bed was, quite rightly, not prepared at that hour in the morning to "interview any damned Dutch pilot who happened to have made a forced landing in the neighbourhood." For the time being, Von Werra was put in charge of the station duty officer. On the whole, I consider that this officer comes rather well out of the affair. From the first he was suspicious of Von Werra. Von Werra's method was to keep up a continuous flow of conversation. He recounted, in greatest detail, his doings of the previous night. They took off, he said, from a northern aerodrome at 1800 hours, crossed the North Sea and reached their target exactly as briefed—it was a well-known Danish aerodrome. "But we are not bombing Denmark," interposed the duty officer. "Yes, we have just started," answered Von Werra, and swept away any objections with a detailed description of the attack. The flak had been heavy, he said, and the mist made the target difficult to see. They had made a couple of bombing runs, the second one at a very low altitude, and had dropped their bombs on to a line of sheds or hangars according to instructions. No, he had not got a direct hit, but one near miss must have done considerable damage. Then his port engine had been hit by light flak and they had had the devil of a job crossing the sea, always losing height, etc. It was a thrilling story, crammed with fictitious detail—but everyone seems to have neglected or forgotten his imaginary crew waiting anxiously for help near their imaginary crashed Wellington. "What is that kit you are wearing?" asked the duty officer, when he could get a word edgeways into Von Werra's stream of talk, "that's not a R.A.F. issue, is it?" he continued

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looking with some gleam of suspicion at Von Werra's boiler suit. "Oh, no," answered Von Werra, not for a moment at a loss. "Before the war I was a K.L.M. pilot on the line between Antwerp and Cologne. This is the kit we used to wear in those civilian days and I find it far more comfortable. It is very hot in a Wellington, you know, unless you have to fly high—— Too hot for the heavy kit they issue," and he led the conversation to less dangerous topics.

From time to time during this *tête-à-tête*, which lasted for nearly three-quarters of an hour, the duty officer's suspicions were aroused only to be allayed once more by glib answers. Von Werra was really a marvellous talker. At last it occurred to the duty officer that no one had yet been rung up nor had the crash been reported. "Don't you think you ought to get on to your station?" he said, "and report that you are safe?" Von Werra agreed.

"Where is your station?"

Von Werra gave the name of a station, far north, on the east coast of Scotland, and a call was put through. From that moment Von Werra began to show signs of an uneasiness. I suppose he thought a call, exposing him, might come through at any minute. He did not know our telephone system. By this time it was well after 8 a.m.; the station was coming to life and a few 'phone calls were coming through to the duty officer.

"Can I use your lavatory?" asked Von Werra.

"Certainly."

"Where is it?"

"Wait a minute, I'll come with you," said the duty officer, feeling suddenly most unwilling to let Von Werra out of his sight. At that moment the 'phone rang and a message of some importance occupied the duty officer's attention. Von Werra, fearing the call might be from the station in Scotland, made clear signs that he wished to visit the lavatory without delay.

"Turn to the left at the bottom of the passage," said the duty officer trying to cut his 'phone call short.

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Von Werra departed, but in a few seconds put his head round the door.

"Did you say, turn to the left or the right?" he asked.

"The left," and the duty officer went on with his work.

"He would never have come back like that," he said to himself, "if he had been trying to bolt."

When, however, five minutes or so had elapsed and Von Werra had not returned, he began to get slightly anxious. He went down to the latrines. No one there. Then he saw that the door of one of the "cabinets" was shut and the "engaged" sign was on the bolt. For a minute or two he waited, then, hearing none of the usual noises, he went up to the door and saw that it was not fully shut though the bolt had been pulled across to make it appear as though it was. There was no one inside. He instantly grasped the fact that Von Werra was a "wrong 'un" and took the swiftest and sanest action within his power. He tore back to his room and put through a few urgent calls to salient points in the camp—the guardroom, the gate, flying control, etc., giving a brief description of Von Werra and issuing orders that he should be grabbed and held if seen. Then he rushed on to the aerodrome. On the far side from the R.A.F. station at Hucknall aerodrome, is the Rolls-Royce testing works. No one, not even an R.A.F. pilot is allowed to enter the precincts. In those days it was out-of-bounds to all ranks. At the moment there was no aerial activity on the station, but the duty officer could see that movement was going on around a Hurricane on the tarmac on the far side. He commandeered a car and racing around the perimeter reached the Rolls-Royce works just in time.

Von Werra was sitting in the Hurricane and one mechanic was standing on the wing explaining to him all the taps and plugs and the drill for taking off and landing. A second mechanic was preparing to start up the engine.

"Come out of it!" roared the duty officer.

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"Oh, it's you, is it?" answered Von Werra, smiling gaily. "What a pity. I have never flown one of these before. I have always wanted to, so much. Just let me have one little flight—just around once, not more, please."

"Come on," said the duty officer, climbing on to the wing and grabbing him by the arm.

"If you insist," and he climbed out, shrugging his shoulders in disgust. On the way back to the aerodrome, Von Werra, once more in the best of humours, owned up to being a German officer prisoner of war. He treated the whole episode as a tremendous joke, apologised for the trouble he had given and was soon after removed to his prison camp and, no doubt, to a week or two of solitary confinement.

The escapist can hardly avoid regrets that Von Werra failed in this bold attempt. It was truly a magnificent effort of bluff against great odds and if it had not been for the sensible and rapid action of the duty officer it would certainly have succeeded. No one, as far as I know, has ever explained how he persuaded the Rolls-Royce mechanics to allow him even to sit in a Hurricane. To have persuaded anyone, under these circumstances, that he, who did not know even the drill, was justified in flying it must have required a story, invented on the spur of the moment, of quite exceptional plausibility even for Von Werra.

As far as I know, only one man has stolen an aeroplane from the enemy in this war and escaped in it, and in the last war, I believe, no one accomplished the feat. Early in 1940, during the invasion of Norway, a Norwegian pilot managed to tow a German seaplane round a small headland and then started it up at leisure and took off. He arrived safely at a port in Scotland. Much against the Norwegian's wishes his C.O. insisted on flying the machine and on his first flight crashed into the sea so that it was no more seen. The C.O. survived.

I know of one other man, an American pilot, Lt. Kelly,



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of the U.S.A.A.F., who had a good try at stealing an F.W. 190. He had been shot down over France and was making his way, dressed in civilian clothes, in the general direction of Spain, when he passed a German aerodrome. He was extremely tired of walking, and with a 300 or 400 mile walk still ahead of him the idea of a glamorous and quick return to England appealed immensely. He had no difficulty in entering the precincts of the aerodrome—in fact, he told me, it was no better guarded than one of our own. He wandered about for a bit, looking into several hangars, and finally favoured one in which was a perfectly good F.W. 190, with its nose pointed to wide open doors. There were no Germans in the hangar so he climbed into the cockpit. Those who have seen the instrument board of a modern aircraft will not be surprised at Kelly's dismay when he saw the immense array of strange taps and plugs and dials without which the modern pilot is apparently unable to fly. As Kelly understood no German the labels and instructions, which the Germans scatter around their instrument board more generously than we do, were of no value. He turned a lot of taps and he pressed a lot of knobs hopefully, but without any result, and after half an hour had regretfully to climb out and continue his journey on foot. When Kelly eventually reached England, after many adventures, the first thing he wanted to learn was how to start a F.W. 190. It is probable that if Kelly could have started the German fighter, no one would have been able to prevent him from taking off and if there had been enough petrol he would have reached England. Whether he would have succeeded in landing there without being shot down is very doubtful. Probably his best chance would have been a very low approach over the Channel and a crash-landing in the first convenient field. It is probable that, in spite of the wide dispersal of aircraft which makes efficient guarding of a modern aerodrome extremely difficult, it was easier and safer to steal an aircraft in the last war

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than in this. But I can't help feeling that if anyone really deserved the honour of doing so it was Von Werra.

A month or two after Von Werra's recapture the Powers That Be, in their wisdom, decided to send him to Canada. Of course, a chit was sent with him to warn those who were to guard him in Canada that he was a persistent escaper and a particularly "naughty boy." Somehow, the chit got lost or mislaid on the way over and he arrived without a black mark to his name.

Just how Von Werra escaped from Canada to the U.S.A. I have never been able to find out. Rumour has it that he crossed the St. Lawrence on ice flows, but however he did it, it was a wonderful feat accomplished by very few.

America was then neutral and Von Werra had made a perfectly legitimate escape to a neutral country. He had by the rules of war a right to return to Germany and fight again. Nevertheless, the Americans stretched their consciences and popped him into prison. But the damage had already been done. As soon as Von Werra reached New York he had visited the German Consul and from there sent by wire a long and detailed report, of all he knew, to the Fatherland. After a week in prison, on the untenable charge of crossing the Canadian border without proper papers, Von Werra was bailed out by the German Consul for 10,000 dollars and spent a most enjoyable few weeks in New York (he was a great man with the ladies) whilst preparing his onward journey. Finally, he jumped his bail, travelled down to Chile and thence made his way home to Germany.

Very deservedly he received the Orde pour le Merite ; for not only was his escape a brilliant feat but the information he carried with him was of the greatest value to his side. The last heard of Von Werra was a rumour, believed to be true, that he had been killed fighting on the Russian front.

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### VIII

#### Evasion of Pilot Officer B. J. A. Rennie

**F**T./LT. RENNIE, the pilot of a Halifax, was returning from bombing Bremen, when he was shot down by a night fighter near Hasselt—The German night defences in those days mainly depended on a great searchlight belt which extended roughly in a curve from Amsterdam to Cologne. Into this band, which was some fifty miles wide, the Germans had collected a vast number of searchlights and the majority of their anti-aircraft guns. The searchlights and the guns were in some way co-ordinated with their night fighters, making opposition—particularly to any stragglers from our bomber force—extremely formidable. A large number of our aircraft were shot down in this area and both the Germans and the natives were very much on the lookout, respectively, to capture or to help those airmen who might have baled out. Rennie and his crew had already had a rough time before they reached the belt; they had been hit by flak over Bremen and were far behind the rest of the bombers and losing height when a night fighter finished off the job.

Rennie was the last to bale out and fell on to the telegraph wires in a small village a few miles north of Hasselt. On the way down he lost his left boot; it is a surprising fact that flying boots frequently come off during a parachute descent. He had some difficulty in extricating himself from a complicated entanglement of wires, ropes and harness, but after a struggle he succeeded and slid down a telegraph pole into the village street, leaving his parachute up on the wires. Incidentally the parachute had his name on it—a thought which afterwards troubled him a good deal and might have led to very serious consequences had he been captured in the later stages of

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his escape. The village appeared to be deserted as he limped along with only one boot on.

When I asked him whether he was then trying to escape, he answered without hesitation that he was doing nothing of the sort. He had had enough excitement for that night, he told me, and did not care who captured him.

When a man has been through a desperate adventure and his life has been in danger and more particularly when he has been subjected to prolonged strain, it is usual, even for the bravest of men, to be extremely unwilling—on reaching comparative safety—to give immediately more hostages to fortune. The natural instinct is to sit down and enjoy a cigarette. Most men who have baled out from burning machines have felt this reaction which lasts for periods varying from a few minutes to a few hours.

In occupied territory these first few minutes are of the utmost importance if capture is to be avoided, and no doubt many airmen have spent years in German prison camps simply because they were unable to steel themselves to an immediate effort on reaching the ground. There was, however, one extraordinarily fortunate crew of a Wellington which crash-landed in the middle of France. The crew were unhurt and for a time they lay about on the ground near their aircraft, smoking cigarettes, with a feeling of thankfulness in their hearts, though apparently no plan in their heads. It was a lovely day and the countryside seemed deserted. After half an hour or so, the captain roused himself with a magnificent effort and reminded his crew that it was their duty to destroy their machine. Without any feelings of urgency or haste, they tried but failed to set it on fire; they then smoked another cigarette to recover from their exertions. Finally it was decided that the plane must at least be damaged to the greatest possible extent—that was clearly their duty. So, using a little axe, they hacked in turns at its tenderest parts for an

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hour or two. It takes a lot of hard work to do much damage to a Wellington with a small axe.

They then held a council of war at which someone made the surprising suggestion that, since no one apparently desired to capture them, they should attempt to escape. This was carried unanimously and they started off in a body in a southerly direction—that is to say towards Spain—some five hundred miles away. Astonishing to relate, they not only passed through France, but reached Spain, and ultimately England without encountering any serious difficulties—a success which many may think is more than they deserved.

. . . But to continue Rennie's story. Rennie walked slowly through the village without any conscious intention of escaping. More than anything else, he felt at that moment a great desire for peace and sympathy. Going round a corner, he came upon some dozen Belgian civilians, who were watching the display of searchlights and anti-aircraft fire, which was still in progress. The moment they caught sight of him they recognised who he was. Two of them seized him by the arms and rushed him into a house and down into the cellar where he lay, still somewhat dazed but slowly recovering. Whilst he was there, Germans entered the village and with great banging of doors and much shouting, started to make a methodical house-to-house search. One of the Belgians came down to the cellar, and leading Rennie out by the back door, watched him crawl carefully into a wheat-field behind the house. A wheat-field is an excellent hiding place, providing you leave no trail of broken stalks to mark your entry. Rennie lay quietly among the wheat, listening till the sounds of the search died away. Resting there, he gradually began to recover his morale. It came to him very forcibly that a number of simple peasants had already taken big risks to save him from capture, and he felt that it was about time that he did something for himself. The neighbourhood of the village was obviously dangerous for him ;

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with his parachute still hanging up on the telegraph wires, the place was sure to be searched again intensively in the morning. It was past midnight and although it was a clear moonlight night, the moon was yet low, and progress along the dark side of the hedgerow was possible. He crawled out of the wheat and made his way carefully along the side of the road for half an hour without seeing anybody.

At last he came upon a solitary man, leaning against a tree, watching the sky where searchlight fingers wandered and coned from time to time. The man was very big and was dressed in civilian clothes. Rennie approached without being seen or heard till he was within a few paces when the man sprang round and stared at him in astonishment.

In moderate French Rennie explained who he was and what he wanted—shoes, clothes, a little food and drink and a cigarette—or perhaps the man would hide him?

The Belgian said not a word but “Venez donc,” and taking Rennie by the arm in a powerful grip, led him along a path through a field. A feeling of increasing uneasiness crept over Rennie as he walked beside the Belgian; he did not like the man’s silence, or perhaps it was the firm grip on his arm. His whole being became alert and all his instincts of self preservation were aroused.

Suddenly, not fifty yards ahead of them, the beam of a searchlight sprang into the air—the Belgian was clearly leading him straight to a searchlight battery. “Non!” hissed Rennie, pulling back and trying to disengage his arm, “Voilà les Boches!”

“Allons,” answered the man, tightening his grip on him with both hands.

The Belgian was a big, powerful fellow, and Rennie, though powerful for his height, saw from the first that the man over-matched him in strength. Without hesitation he kicked the Belgian so effectively that he fell noiselessly

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in a heap and lay unconscious. Rennie then moved quietly back to the main road and continued along the hedge until he reached the outskirts of the village. Here he came upon a small group of peasants, who were terrified when they recognised him as an R.A.F. pilot ; they were Flamands, and he had some difficulty in making himself understood. They were unwilling to help—they were too poor, they said, to give him clothes, and were obviously too frightened to hide him. But they showed friendship by giving him cigarettes and pointing him on his way. It was 3 a.m. of a very bright moonlight night when he found himself walking southward along the towpath of a canal (of which there were many in that part of the country). All around the countryside was flat and there was no good cover for hiding ; there was nothing to be done but to go on. He felt hunted and alone in the world and horribly conspicuous in the moonlight as he hobbled along with only one boot. After walking for about half an hour he saw someone coming towards him along the towpath. He needed help urgently, for it was nearly daybreak, but at first he was unable to distinguish whether it was a friend or foe. When they were about fifty yards apart Rennie realised suddenly that it was a German soldier with a rifle slung over his shoulder. There was no cover. If he ran for it he might be shot, and even if the German missed him, which was hardly possible at such close range, it would in any case rouse the neighbourhood. It was best to go on, and Rennie had already made his plan. The German was less than twenty yards away before he seemed to notice Rennie. When hardly a dozen yards apart he realised that Rennie was in a strange uniform. Germans usually shout when they are very excited or surprised. This man roared at Rennie. As they came close together the German stared at his uniform as if incredulous, and then shouted in his face in the unpleasant way that Germans have. Rennie stood stock still. Then, suddenly looking up, he pointed with his left hand over the German's shoulder

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and cried out "Achtung !" (look out—beware !). The German turned his head quickly, and as he did so Rennie kicked him violently with his only boot, and all his strength, in the same manner he had kicked the other man a short time ago. The German fell with a terrible cry and the rifle slipped from his shoulder. Rennie snatched it almost before it had reached the ground, and with the butt hit him on the side of the head. Then he chucked the rifle into the canal and dragged the corpse off the towpath. He stamped the body well into the mud at the side of the canal. Then, gathering some reeds, he laid them over the grave to hide it. There was a pool of blood on the towpath which he obliterated with a few handfuls of gravel. Having attended to these gruesome details, but with his clothes and his hands now covered with blood, he continued his walk along the path.

It was now after 4 a.m., and Rennie owned that he felt very tired. Finding a patch of grass near the towpath, he lay down and went to sleep. It was not good cover, but he was exhausted by all he had been through.

About 7 a.m. he woke in bright sunlight and saw a man walking towards him. Rennie waited until he was quite near and then almost in a whisper said, "Bon Belge ?" for he had learnt during that night that there were two sorts of Belgians, "Bon Belge" and "Boche Belge"—those who are loyal and those who helped the Germans either openly or in secret. When, therefore, Rennie whispered "Bon Belge ?" the man understood him immediately, for in the searchlight belt every good Belgian lived in a state of tension, never knowing at what moment he might be called upon to risk his life for the cause. The man, who was dressed in miner's clothes, first looked about to make sure there was no one in sight and then answered, "Oui !"

Rennie was a nasty sight ; there was blood on his uniform and on his face and hands. He washed quickly in the canal and then he and the miner made their way



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across the meadows and reached a house without apparently being seen by anyone. Here he hid in the garden, and an amazing thing happened. Parcels of civilian clothes were thrown over the wall to him, and before long, he told me, he had sufficient to clothe at least five men. He had certainly been seen by friends, and probably his presence in the district had been reported to the Germans. He changed into civilian clothes, and then, borrowing a suit-case, packed into it his dirty bloodstained uniform. This case he carried with him during the whole of the rest of his adventures as far as the Pyrenees—an act of inconceivable folly, which without doubt would have cost him his life had he been caught. In practice the Germans have always taken a lenient view of an evader caught trying to escape in civilian clothes, although the law is not very clear on the legal position. What the Germans have always objected to is any attempt to be half and half, i.e. any preparations to be either combatant or non-combatant at will. Their objections are rooted in the 1870 war with France, when after the German invasion there was a *levée en masse* of Frenchmen. A *levée en masse* is a legitimate device for defending your country, but the rules are that anyone joining the *levée* must wear some agreed distinguishing mark to show he is a combatant—a military hat or an arm-band. In 1870, however, many Frenchmen interpreted these rules (if, indeed, they recognised them at all) in a manner more convenient to themselves. When the German invaders passed by they were peaceful farmers, for example, working on their farms. But when an opportunity occurred and a solitary German came within range, they put on their military hat, picked out the hidden rifle, potted the German and then once more, having hidden the hat and the rifle again, became peaceful farmers who, by the laws of war, the Germans could not touch. “No,” said the German authorities. “We can’t allow that. Either you must keep your hat on all the time so that we can shoot you whenever we see you, or

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you must not take part in the war. You can't have it both ways." This, it seems to me, was a legitimate view to take.

Rennie's danger was even greater than would at first appear, for he not only kept the tell-tale uniform and his identification discs, but he had also left his parachute with his name on it among the telephone wires, making the train of circumstantial evidence complete.

He had not been in the garden very long when word was received that the Germans were coming. Once more he went out at the back and hid in a wheat-field and, when the Germans searched the house and garden, steps had already been taken to ensure that they would find nothing suspicious. At last the search died down and Rennie, now in passable civilian clothes, well provided with food and carrying his suit-case, made his way southwards for some days without having any adventure worth recording. Later he was passing through a small village in the early morning when he heard the faint sound of a voice which was somehow familiar. The words were quite inaudible, but the intonation struck a chord in his memory. Could it be from another member of his crew? he asked himself, and put his ear against the closed shutters. Suddenly he realised it was Alvar Liddel's voice giving out the 7 a.m. news on the B.B.C. Obviously the house contained friends, for the penalties for listening to the B.B.C. were extremely severe. He crept round to the back of the house and threw open the door suddenly. Two girls who were sitting in a corner close to a wireless set uttered little screams of surprise and rose to face their intruder; they were obviously frightened and switched off the wireless quickly—they had been caught red-handed.

Rennie shut the door and explained who he was. He talked quite passable French and was given a joyous welcome. He stayed one night at the cottage, but next day transferred his lodging to the cellar of an hotel. The hotel proprietor, whilst billeting Germans, was at the same time an ardent patriot whose son, a young

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fellow in the early twenties, desired above all else to get to England to join the Belgian army. He and Rennie decided to join forces. After preparations which took them a fortnight, they left by train for Paris with plenty of money and all the necessary forged papers. The rest of the journey can be told very shortly. The journey to Paris was uneventful; they stayed there with friends. From Paris they went by train to Tours, and from there set out on foot to cross the line of demarcation between Occupied and Unoccupied France. Very foolishly they did not trouble to get a guide, and so spent two nights and a day chasing, or rather being chased, round and round in the woods with sentries apparently on all sides of them. A wood is nearly always a bad place in which to cross a frontier, and many escapers have made this mistake. In woods it is the usual habit of the Germans to place the line of sentries at well-camouflaged stationary posts where they can hear but not be seen. Fortunately, however, the Germans, having hidden their sentries with the greatest care, usually carried out the reliefs every two hours without the slightest regard for secrecy; consequently it was by no means difficult for the local inhabitants, on either side of the demarcation line, to locate the sentries with great exactitude and therefore to pass from one side of the line to the other at will and without serious risk.

Rennie and his companion eventually ran into a stray German sentry off duty when they were almost through the lines. He asked them where they were going. "To Tours," they answered (a town in occupied France from which they were trying to escape). "Well, you are not allowed to pass through here," he said, and sent them on into Unoccupied France, which was, of course, exactly what they wanted. It was an excellent ruse, and was used on many occasions by many escapers in similar circumstances.

Travelling by train, they reached the district of the Pyrénées, and there, very sensibly, hid in a stable near a friendly farm till they found a guide who led them to safety over the mountains into Spain.

# Escape and Liberation

## Part Two





## I

### The Liberation of Westertimke and Barth

THE United Nations were fully aware that, on the unconditional surrender of Germany, they would be faced with a problem of almost insuperable difficulty.

During the five years of war a large number of civilians, amounting in all to many millions, had been compelled to leave their homes and make their lives as best they could elsewhere. Amongst the first of the refugees in 1940 were many Belgian families whose elders remembered the invasion of 1914, and were determined to avoid, if possible, the experience of living again under German occupation. Of all nations in Europe the Belgians have most experience of conquerors. But the advent of the tank and motor transport in quantity had so changed conditions—more particularly the speed at which an army can advance—that many of the refugees, after terrible experiences, were overtaken and returned, miserable and exhausted, to their homes. Only those who had cars and by luck or bribery were able to obtain petrol for the journey, reached the uneasy sanctuary of unoccupied France and eked out an unenviable existence, far from their homes, in a land where there was no more liberty and even less food than in occupied Belgium. The story is much the same of those French who fled before the German advance in France, and the tale of their experiences has been told many times.

But these refugees amounted in all to relatively small numbers—perhaps a few score thousand. The great exodus, the great dispersal of families, did not take place till after the Germans had fully occupied almost all the numerous lands of Europe. Partly as punishment for

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actual or supposed breaches of German regulations, many hundreds of thousands of men and women (but chiefly men) were sent to labour in Germany under threats of vengeance on their families if they attempted to return. Many more were induced by promises of better conditions of food and pay in Germany (promises which were by no means always false) and stimulated by threat of the cancelling of their ration cards, to volunteer for work in the German Reich.

As the lack of finality in the German victory became increasingly obvious to the conquered nations, and as the growing strength of the United Nations raised hopes of ultimate liberation, so resistance in the occupied countries grew in strength and skill and became a serious menace to the Germans—more particularly to the morale of the occupying troops.

Contrary to what is generally believed, the Germans are a simple, sentimental, home-loving race, and it became a habit among the French and Belgians to commiserate with the German soldiers, and with evil intent, to reduce them often to tears by reference to their wives, sweethearts and children, far away in Germany, or perhaps buried by the R.A.F. under mountains of rubble, whilst they, miserable cannon-fodder, eked out solitary existences, unwanted and unloved, in a foreign land.

As more and more men were required for the war in Russia and for the occupation of newly-conquered lands, and as the necessity for a vast increase in all munitions demanded more and more labour in Germany, so the Germans gathered, by all possible means, voluntary and compulsory—mainly the latter—workmen and women from the occupied countries.

From the east and west, from the north and from the Balkans, particularly from Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Ukraine, the countries were skinned of labour till, at the end of the war, not less than ten million foreign civilians were under slave labour conditions on the land

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and in the factories of the Reich. To these ten million civilians must be added the prisoners of war in the hands of the Germans. Altogether twelve or thirteen million is believed to be a fair estimate for the combined total of prisoners and "displaced persons" inhabiting Germany at the time of the Rhine crossing.

Displaced Persons, or D.P., is the term given by S.H.A.E.F. to the civilian refugees, and X.P.W. is the sign by which liberated prisoners were referred to in official documents.

From the time our armies crossed the Rhine and advanced rapidly through Germany from the west, whilst roughly at the same time the Russians advanced from the east, the whole position was greatly complicated by the hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Germans who fled towards the interior before both the advancing armies. As the occupied portion of Germany rapidly diminished it became clear that the Germans, influenced, no doubt, by their own propaganda, feared the Russians far more than the British or the Americans and attempted when there was any choice—to enter the British or American zone of occupation in preference to the Russian zone. In consequence of this dominant fear, scores of thousands of Germans, on the approach of the Russian armies, uprooted themselves from their comfortable farms and villages, and taking what household goods they could carry with them, joined the ranks of the displaced persons and drifted towards the British and American armies.

The problem of the D.P.s and X.P.W.s were fully appreciated by S.H.A.E.F., and immense preparations were made to deal with it. Scores of conferences took place, masses of statistics were collected, tons of paper were used and hundreds of reports were written. Finally all the effort gave birth with painful labour to a terrifying and detailed document containing minute instructions to an immense organisation, including, it was rumoured, 400 newly-created lieutenant-colonels, as to



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how all probable, possible, and impossible contingencies should be dealt with.

It came within the scope of my duties to read and attempt to digest this amazing document, and to extract therefrom such portions of it as might affect my own future operations. Whether these huge and careful preparations produced a machine which in practice dealt satisfactorily with the D.P. question I do not know, for as I write the problem still exists. But the preparations were a noble effort.

My own interest and duty were confined to the small portion of the plan which dealt with ex-prisoners of war—their liberation, their evacuation, their interrogation, their reception, and their final transport to the bosom of their families. A further peculiar duty was to collect at the earliest possible date any information which might lead to the arrest and punishment of any German who had committed atrocities against the prisoners of war of the United Nations. It certainly promised to be an interesting job, and I interpreted my general instructions to mean that it was my duty to enter any prisoner-of-war camp in which there were British or American prisoners as soon as possible after the liberating troops and to conduct my examination on the spot.

With the object of obtaining all available information from the fountain-head I set out with my small section on April 13th from Holland and travelled by easy stages via Brussels to Paris. My section consisted of two cars (an Austin 10 and a 15-cwt. lorry), and two men. For over a year and through all our vicissitudes, Arthur Croxson was my driver, batman, carpenter and cook. He was an excellent mixer, and speaking pure Bucks dialect himself, somehow made himself understood equally well in any language. The comfort and efficiency of our section owes much to him. Jimmy Wilde, my excellent and reliable clerk, though coming from a relatively sheltered life, soon adapted himself to the rough and tumble of B.E.F. existence. As will be seen, when

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difficulties arose his courage and his ability left nothing to be desired. These two landed with me on the Normandy beaches, in the small hours of July 5th, 1944, and remained my faithful friends and supporters till the section was disbanded in June, 1945. I owe a very great deal to both of them and herewith send them my thanks and best wishes.

I have never seen Paris look more beautiful. For the three days that we were there the sun shone, sparkling on the river and lighting up the domes and spires, whilst a light breeze rustled the fresh leaves along the boulevards. Bicycles in hundreds circulated on the clean, wide roads, the bright skirts of the pretty girls ballooning behind them in the wind.

But Paris, in spite of outward appearances, was neither happy nor hospitable; she had put on her brightest pre-war dress, but inwardly she was miserable, hungry and humiliated. Above all, she desired the foreigner to depart and leave her to adjust herself to a new way of life—to recover her morale and to revenge herself on those who had betrayed her.

The food and transport situations were desperate; there was hardly any fuel, the gas supply was spasmodic and even the electric light often petered out just when one needed it most.

At a rate of exchange of 200 francs to the £, the cost of food and drink in the restaurants and cafés was almost prohibitive, and although a few shows could be seen—mostly of the naked revue type—few, with the exception of Americans on leave, could afford to visit them.

I was given a room in an army-controlled hotel, the Bedford, where army rations dished up by a good French chef were made extremely appetising. We fed well, were comfortably housed—but it was not Paris. We were isolated from the inhabitants. There was nothing to do in the evenings. During the day we visited Versailles, and there, in a tiny cramped room in the Petit Ecurie,

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we discussed with the authorities the anticipated liberation of the prisoner-of-war camps in Germany and my new duties in regard to ex-prisoners of war. My first mission was to visit the string of transit or reception camps (Ramps was the technical S.H.A.E.F. term) which were in process of being formed for the purpose of catching, housing, de-lousing, reclothing, paying, and interrogating all, or any, prisoners of war who might be liberated from the camps inside Germany, and make their way westwards, either officially in Army transport or unofficially by all modes of motion, from shank's pony to a stolen Mercédès car.

These camps were strung out along the French-German border at intervals of about 100 miles, and their organisation and preparation were being given an extremely high priority. For labour, for transport, for supplies, and for all necessary accessories these camps, I was told, had precedence over every military operation with the exception of the evacuation of the wounded.

Three of the camps I was instructed to visit were in the American zone, and I looked forward with interest to seeing the famous American "hustle" which, considering the priority power available, should here have ample scope.

I may say I was not disappointed, and I came away with a very great respect for two young American colonels. This respect for the best type of American was fully endorsed by other notable examples of American energy and push which I encountered nearer to the front lines.

Our first camp was at Epinal. It seemed unnecessary to take Arthur and the fifteen-hundredweight lorry, so I sent him back alone to Holland, where he could be of real value in aiding the scanty transport of our H.Q. With Jimmy (my clerk) I set off early on April 17th on the long run from Paris to Epinal.

It was a glorious day, with hardly a cloud in the sky. On all sides there were the signs of spring. The

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cherry blossom was out and lilac trees in full bloom clustered round almost every house. At any time of the year this country must be beautiful, and now the late rains had turned the well-kept forest of Fontainebleau to a fresh and vivid green. It is a well-wooded and well-cultivated land. Little streams burble happily about the countryside and the small agricultural villages appear like pearls strung along the main roads with cushions of cherry blossom amidst ancient roofs and narrow dirty streets.

For a hundred miles or more we travelled on perfect roads unworn by war, through endless avenues of trees which it is the delightful habit of continental Europe to plant on either side of their highways. The country gradually became rougher and wilder. Outcrops of rock, which we had first noticed at Fontainebleau, became more frequent and the tops of the low hills soon had that bare and arid look which is usual in the Midi. We made wonderful progress through villages which gradually became dirtier and more tumbled down, but were none the less picturesque for that.

About 100 miles from Paris we lunched at a café where the proprietor proved to be a Spaniard who had fled from the Revolutionary wars and married a Frenchwoman. Times were difficult, he said, and everything was terribly dear. There was plenty of wine in the South of France, but absence of transport made it almost unobtainable. I paid 13 francs for a small glass of very poor red wine.

During the first 200 miles there was hardly a soldier to be seen, and except for the price of everything and the scarcity of goods, there were no signs of war. We reached the unattractive town of Epinal, over gradually deteriorating roads, about 7 p.m. and crossing the river, mounted the steep hill to the camp.

This camp consisted of the old French military barracks laid out in the form of a hollow square

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and capable, I should think, of housing some 10,000 troops.

Less than a week before my arrival it had been occupied by "displaced persons" of every nationality, the majority being Poles and Russians. Many of these latter, owing to the unimaginable horrors through which they had passed as slaves of the Germans, had lost all sense of decency and had become sub-human in their sanitary habits. They were unbelievably filthy as they came from their liberated labour camps; they were lousy and seemed to have forgotten the need for washing or the use of latrines. For their natural functions, as well as for expectoration, they employed any odd spot, including the rooms where they slept.

A youngish American colonel had been deputed to turn his camp into a reception camp for prisoners of war. He took one glance at the place and proceeded to make the fullest use of his priorities. He demanded and obtained next day, twenty American officers and a number of N.C.O.'s with telephones, typewriters and office equipment for all. He ordered 5,000 field hospital beds. He ordered and obtained a hospital but most important of all, he requisitioned 1,000 German prisoners of war from a neighbouring camp.

Now there are many ways of making use of German prisoners as labourers; you can place small gangs under British and American Tommies, in which case you will get little work done; you can place large gangs under good forcible but foreign N.C.O.'s. This gives somewhat better results because the Germans automatically look to their own N.C.O.'s for instructions. Far the best way is to tell the German N.C.O.'s exactly what is required and leave them to it. When this treatment is applied, supported by suitable threats, the German prisoners of war are marvellous workmen. The habit of obedience is so ingrained in them and their respect for high rank so firmly established, that they will give of their best and even take a pride in doing so, however

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adverse and unnatural the circumstances may be. That camp at Epinal was cleaned up and disinfected in two days ; not even a cigarette end was to be seen on the parade ground—no scrap of dirty paper. The trees and the edges of the pavements were whitewashed. The gardens were dug up and 2,000 new plants, especially ordered by the Colonel, were blooming happily when I arrived. There were no chairs and tables in the place, so wood was ordered and some 80 German carpenters turned out combined tables and benches, according to the German regulation military pattern, at a quite incredible speed. The Colonel possessed no cooks ; so the cook-house was taken over by the Germans and excellently run, with American rations, under the very loose guidance of a couple of American N.C.O.'s. In three days telephones had been installed in every office. If you needed a batman, the German prisoner-of-war camp was capable of providing a first-class valet.

Tony Ireland, the actor, who was our representative at this camp, swears that his German batman stood at attention outside his room all day waiting and apparently hoping for further orders. Tony Ireland also wanted a typewriter and a clerk. The Americans gave him the first and the Germans produced the second—a paragon of a clerk whom Tony said could take down shorthand in five different languages and was “dis-dressingly well educated.”

In fact, five days after the Americans had arrived on the scene, 5,000 beds had been set up ready for the reception of ex-prisoners of war. A delousing and re-clothing shed had been completely built by German labour. A small hospital with ten beds and all necessary medical appliances was in working order. The amount of equipment sent in by the Americans was staggering, and the whole place smelt of disinfectant and was so clean that one dared not even throw a cigarette end on to the sand of the parade ground

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As an instance of the *tempo* of the organisation, I may say that the day started at 6 a.m. and you could not get breakfast after 7 a.m. No one will be surprised to learn that Tony and I both felt shattered and humble when faced with this volcanic method of dealing with an urgent task. Comparisons are odious, but nothing in our previous experience of war had prepared us for such a display of energy.

That night, Jimmy and I had comfortable billets in an hotel in Epinal which had been commandeered by the Americans. Here I made the grave blunder of mistaking our dynamic colonel for the hotel manager. However, he forgave me the next day and with most justifiable pride showed us over his reception camp.

Many travellers have told of the beauties of the journey up the Meuse through some of the most superb scenery in Europe.

I will not attempt to describe it in detail although Jimmy and I saw it under most perfect conditions.

We started with a puncture soon after leaving Epinal which cost us an hour of sweat and dirt. Thence by Verdun and Toul we passed through a rugged vine-covered country and climbed through the woods of the Ardennes over the steep shoulder which guards the southern bank of the Meuse. We gathered that the American Third Army had passed this way, for very frequently by the sides of the road, we saw small notice boards each containing one line of a rhyme exhorting the American lorry drivers to drive with care and mind their tyres. One of them ran something like this :—

“ Stretch that rubber  
Mend those cuts  
Up with the Ammo.  
For Blood and Guts.”

The last line is a reference to General Patton's army nickname. Another I remember made me wonder,

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when I read the first two lines, whether the American Army was here expressing a deep-seated discontent :—

“ General Myers  
Is the King of Liars  
Because he said  
We’ve lots of tyres.”

Each line is read at an interval of about 100 yards and our anxiety was not relieved till we reached the final line.

Passing through a small village isolated in the hills north of Toul, I remembered the lack of wine further north and determined to try and buy a few bottles. The village looked desperately poor, but on the hillside behind was a small but well kept vineyard. I stopped the car and asked an old man who was sawing wood whether he had wine to sell. He chewed over the question for a full minute.

“ No,” he answered at last. “ We only make wine for our own use. I don’t wish to sell.” (A long pause). “ Not for money, for there is nothing to buy.”

I caught the idea. “ What do you want most ? ” I asked.

“ Nous manquons de tout,” he said simply.

“ Is a kilo of sugar, fifty cigarettes, and a tin or two of Army rations of any interest ? ” I asked.

On this basis we soon got down to a business deal of great benefit to both sides.

We entered the house and were introduced to all its inhabitants. We tasted the wine drawn from a cask, where it had lain for two years, Madame assured us. The bargaining was done slowly and deliberately as befitted a barter of such importance. The bottles had to be washed and corks found, and we departed at last with four litres of passable wine and many expressions of esteem and gratitude on both sides.

What a trade there is to be done in France and



elsewhere in Europe for those who can carry the right goods to the right places !

As we came over the west shoulder of the wild hills below Brie, we were met by scenery of incomparable beauty. Far below us the azure Meuse passed like a ribbon through a valley of vivid green—perhaps half a mile wide—whence the wooded hills of the Ardennes rose abruptly and continued as far as the eye could see. In the middle distance, a lake of intense blue passed out of sight behind an arid spur of rock, and at the far end of the valley, some four miles distant, a little town with the midday sun glinting on its white walls and bright red roofs nestled in its green setting, the outlying villas scattered up the hills on either side, making patches of colour against the sombre background of fir trees.

At Sedan we found that the huge, dirty barracks to which we had been directed had been abandoned by ex-prisoners of war and the reception camp transferred to the neighbourhood of Rheims.

Owing to the invariable hospitality of the Americans we had no difficulty in getting food and then set out, weary though we were, about 9 p.m. to cover the 80 miles to Rheims, where a reception camp was being prepared. The camp, when I visited it, was in the awkward and irritating transition stage. High up officials paid brief and rather futile visits of inspection, and those with power had no knowledge, and those with knowledge had no power. However, much was learnt by the hard way of experience, and in the end many thousands of prisoners of war were passed satisfactorily through the camp.

Here I found Hamilton Gay—our charming, intelligent, but somewhat highly-strung representative—rather overwhelmed by the innumerable things which were not as they should be. We had a grand "grouse" together which lasted far into the night, and we both felt the better for getting so much off our chests.

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Next day before departing, we saw the American colonel in charge and by way of spurring him on to greater efforts, gave him an enthusiastic description of the eruption at Epinal, which I hope and believe encouraged him to use some of the impressive priority powers he possessed.

The run to Namur, mostly along the banks of the Meuse, was chiefly remarkable for the beauty of the scenery, the distressing state of the bridges over the Meuse which get blown up every war by one side or the other, the rapidly deteriorating state of the road, and the total disregard of American drivers for the previously noted exhortations to drive with care.

The roads are narrow, usually with a 20 foot drop into the Meuse over a low wall on the right—the pot-holes terrible, so that 15 miles per hour was about a maximum speed for my little car. Nevertheless innumerable American lorries roared past us at 50 m.p.h. or more, and disappeared round the steep cliffs on our left in clouds of dust. There were moments of real danger and we were thankful when we reached our journey's end in the beautiful city of Namur. Here as usual we lodged and fed in the greatest comfort on the generous hospitality of the Americans.

The reception camp was on very different lines to that of either Epinal or Rheims. For sleeping accommodation the barracks had been taken over, but for delousing, re-clothing, medical inspection and the other operations, a luxurious hospital had been commandeered and the whole system had been in almost perfect working order for weeks. At the head of this excellent organisation was an American colonel of a calibre almost equal to that of the demi-god at Epinal. He was a fierce and ruthless man, but his technique with German prisoners of war, though satisfying to his soul, was to my mind not the most perfect from the point of view of pure efficiency. He used black negro N.C.O.'s to direct the labours of small gangs of German prisoners. These

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N.C.O.'s certainly pushed the Germans around, but I noted that little work was done compared to what they were capable of doing far more happily under their own N.C.O.'s.

The journey to Holland next day with memories of the Ardennes in our minds was dull and uninteresting and became progressively duller as we got further northwards.

Major Elwes was reputed to have set up a reception camp at just north of Senlis, but when we reached the place, we found he had moved and had left no address.

One incident on the road has remained very clearly in my memory. We passed through a small village all decked out with bunting and bright paper streamers as for a fête. We asked the reason and were told it was a religious festival and that we should pass the procession a few miles along the road. We soon overtook some 200 men, women and children, mostly dressed in black who were escorting a wooden handcart on which was a white boat. In the boat, sitting demurely in the bows, with her hands crossed in her lap, was a sweet life-sized figure of the Virgin Mary.

The handcart was drawn by children and a small flock of black-gowned priests brought up the rear of the procession from which a droning chant rose intermittently. A mile further along the road we met another procession—obviously coming to meet the first. It was headed by a charming choir of children in red and white surplices who sang most beautifully as they walked.

On reaching Helmond on April 20th, I found that my C.O. was away and that Arthur and my 15-cwt. lorry had been lent to another section. However, my orders were clear. I was to take leave of the Tactical Air Force to whom I had been attached for the past year and proceed to Celle, north of Hanover, where there was a forward reception camp under British control, through which many ex-prisoners of war were expected to pass. After a somewhat acrimonious discussion concerning my

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missing transport and a written promise that it would be returned to me at an early date, Jimmy and I pushed off to Suchteln, the H.Q. of T.A.F. and spent the evening clearing up odds and ends and taking leave of many friends with whom I had worked for the last year.

Going about Germany, particularly if alone and practically unarmed, had at first a real element of excitement. Thoughts of "were-wolves" and S.S. float continually in one's mind when one was compelled to pass long stretches of lonely forest roads where the surface had been so cut to pieces by the passing of an army, that in many places only a slow crawl was possible.

It is true that in the very early stages of our occupation and particularly in the Western Provinces, we had black looks of intense hatred cast at us from some of the younger women. Even this hatred I fancy did not last for long.

As we went further East, so we got nearer to the Russians. The very thought of the Russians exercised a dominating fear over the German mind, so that our occupation, at first tolerated, very soon was accepted (when it was obvious that someone was going to occupy their land)—almost with gratitude. Whatever the truth about the behaviour of the Russians—and I shall have something to say about this later—the Germans were victims of their own propaganda and were scared stiff.

From the very first, all over Germany, the older men and women (those who had memories of 1918) were friendly, and together with the children were only too ready to fraternise. Of young German men, there were practically none.

On the roads thousands of young men and girls—for the most part quite reasonably dressed—wandered through Germany seemingly in all directions. Almost all of them carried luggage, sometimes in rough bundles and sometimes in smart leather boxes; some of them marched with rucksacks or rode bicycles, but more often

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they pulled some type of handcart, anything from a perambulator to a farm waggon drawn by a team of men and women. At night they camped by the side of the roads, their cooking fires gleaming from the woods ; occasionally they used barns and deserted houses. From time to time one heard rumours of looting or even worse. but for the most part and for all I saw, they were completely harmless, peaceable individuals, struggling rather pitiably and hopelessly to get back to their distant homes. Very soon one came to treat them as part of the normal scenery ; they never asked for help, nor did we offer help—we just took no notice of each other. Yet in my mind many pictures of them still survive and will always remain, and many questions clamour for answers.

For the most part the D.P. looked neither famished nor ill. There were exceptions to this, and when one passed a walking skeleton, it seemed pretty obvious that he had escaped from some foul concentration camp. Some of the parties honestly looked as though they were enjoying themselves and passed us chatting and laughing as though they were on a walking tour in the beautiful summer weather.

Other parties were composed of tough, hard-bitten, unshaven men, often with the letters " P " or " OST " on a bit of cloth sewn on to their clothes. These were ex-prisoners of war on the march—usually Poles or Russians. Often it was most difficult to guess their nationality. Among them were many parties of young Germans, fifteen to eighteen years of age, who were apparently treated in a perfectly friendly manner by the D.P. ; in fact I often saw Germans and other nationalities walking together in the same party in the most friendly manner. These German boys were the latest class called up by the German army. They had arrived too late to fight and were now returning to their homes.

Never in the history of the world has there been such an astonishing mixture of nationalities. It was as though the Devil were playing a huge jest on humanity

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and had collected ten million of the youth of all the nations of Europe, and then suddenly told them to find their own way home again. I feel that the dignity, the efficiency, and the good temper of these young people (for they were mostly under thirty) should be recorded and recognised by history.

Arthur Koestler in his book, *The Scum of the Earth*, has written of the refugees in France. I hope that some competent writer will give a true picture of the Displaced Persons as they trekked back from Germany ; for the great majority were the best of the youth of their respective nations.

However bad the marked military roads might be, and for long stretches they were dangerously pot-holed, Jimmy and I soon found it unwise to attempt any deviation. Twice, after skimming for many miles along perfect roads selected by ourselves, we were brought up sharply by broken bridges and had to make tedious detours back to the military road, "240 up" from which we had previously departed.

Next day we pushed on to Celle, hitting the main autobahn north of Hanover and following it for 30 miles. Very small use has ever been made by the Germans of these magnificent roads. Prior to the war, there was insufficient civilian traffic to justify their existence, and during the last two years of the war they were far too conspicuous a target for our roving aircraft. After the invasion of France, these autobahns were used principally as runways for jet-propelled aircraft. During my wanderings in Germany I came upon many of these curious looking craft, hiding themselves in the trees and bushes by the side of a straight strip of autobahn.

We reached Celle on the evening of April 23rd after some trouble with a broken bridge, where the car had to be carried across by a band of wandering Poles. We found the transit camp in a big German barracks on the outskirts of the town. Similar barracks seem to have been built in every town of any size throughout Germany.

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Already a few hundred of our ex-prisoners of war had passed through this camp and more were—but rather vaguely—expected. I was warned to immobilise my car in a most thorough manner and when I asked “why?” the ex-prisoners of war X (PWX) officials rather shamefacedly confessed that the ex-prisoners of war had stolen most of the PWX transport and in it continued their journey westwards.

Altogether I did not look forward with much pleasure to a prolonged stay in Celle transit camp. I was, therefore, delighted when a message arrived by word of mouth from my H.Q. in Holland, addressed to a section of our department (which was supposed to be in Celle) giving instructions that someone should be sent to Westertimke—a prisoner-of-war camp likely to be liberated within the next few days.

I determined to go myself, leaving the section, which was presumably on its way, to deal with any ex-prisoners of war who might arrive at Celle.

At 7 a.m. the next morning, Jimmy and I were on the move once more, and travelling cross-country by devious roads, reached the 30th Corps H.Q., who were camped out in a charming little village south-east of Bremen. Bremen, we learnt, had not yet fallen, but Westertimke—where there were eight to ten thousand British and American prisoners of war, as well as a large number of merchant seamen—was likely to be over-run by the Guards Armoured Division, attacking from the north-east, during the next few days. The general view was that Bremen must fall soon, since the attack by the Guards threatened to cut off the defenders of Bremen from the Lübeck district, where the remnants of the northern German armies seemed to be accumulating.

We spent the night with the 30th Corps, sleeping in a little farm house from which the German inhabitants had been ejected. From my bedroom, which was quite a comfortable modern room with a good spring bed, I

could look into the barn where half a dozen cows stood in a row behind perpendicular wooden bars through which they could pass their heads but not their bodies. It was all very simple and primitive and in the early morning, a delicious smell of warm milk announced that the cows were being milked. The pigs—including a sow with a large litter—lived in a luxurious pig-sty, also attached to the house. Both for the animals and for the human beings, the standard of comfort compared to that usually found in agricultural districts in England, was high, though a very strong smell of the farmyard pervaded the house.

Twice a day the farm hands were permitted to return to their houses to tend their animals. Most of these labourers were Russian or Polish women who had been living for four years with these German families and seemed quite content ; in fact, I should be surprised if many of them wished to return to their own countries again.

The farm barns are delightfully picturesque. In northern Germany nearly all are made on the same pattern ; they have heavy-looking bright red Dutch tiled roofs, supported at 5 foot intervals by square wooden beams which run from the eaves. Wooden cross-beams are nailed between the perpendiculars so that the sides of the barn are divided into squares, and the walls completed by filling these gaps with red bricks. The general rule is to build huge barns, the dwelling house at one end being under the same roof. The barns with their bright red roofs and chequered sides, nestling in a clump of trees, are a distinctive and pleasant feature of the countryside.

Except for occasional villages where actual fighting had taken place, the greater part of the country seemed quite untouched by war. Cattle, pigs, and poultry abounded, and there seemed to be no lack of butter and eggs.

The next two days we spent with the Guards Armoured



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Division at Sittigen, waiting for news of the relief of Westertimke, and enjoying splendid hospitality.

On the morning of April 25th, I went forward to the 32nd Brigade, who were camped out in rather a muddy field beside the main road. As we arrived there we saw with surprise two Germans in naval uniform walking up the road towards us. They were both blindfolded and each was led by a British Tommy. We stopped and watched them as they turned off the road and were escorted slowly over the field to a group of Army office vans a few hundred yards away. We soon learnt from officers around that these Germans had come as an embassy from Westertimke camp. Greatly interested, we followed them at a respectful distance. The two Germans—one a thin, tired, good-looking fellow and the other a typical heavy-looking Prussian—his neck bulging over his collar—were halted outside the H.Q. cars, and the bandages removed from their eyes. A sorry pair they looked and no one felt much sympathy or any inclination to fraternise. It was just at this time that all the ghastly details of Belsen Concentration camp were in the papers.

Korvettan Kapitan Rogge had been assistant commandant of Westertimke camp for a couple of years and had the reputation (as I learnt afterwards) of being a just and reasonable man. He spoke English well and when I came up, he was being interrogated by a staff captain. The proposal he had to make was that there should be a truce for eight hours whilst the English and American prisoners from the prisoner-of-war camp were marched through to our lines. This proposal was turned down by the Brigadier without hesitation, and the two ambassadors were informed that they would be treated as prisoners of war. I must own that this treatment seemed to me pretty drastic at the time. The two Germans protested as violently as they dared, but no one felt inclined to treat Germans as if they had any "rights" whatever.

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It was my duty to interrogate Kapitan Rogge and find out about the conditions in the camp. He assured me that there was ample food in the camp, that the prisoners had been well treated and that no atrocities had been committed. I told him that it would go ill with him if his words proved to be untrue for I proposed to take him back with me into the camp. At this he frankly seemed delighted, but protested again at being detained as a prisoner. I fetched an English newspaper in which there was a ghastly photograph of the "death pit" in Belsen concentration camp.

"What right have you Germans who are responsible for such atrocities to protest at any treatment?" I asked him. Rogge and the fat German studied these pictures with interest and horror and thereafter had nothing more to say.

Our Brigadier had summed up the meaning of this embassy with great accuracy, as I confirmed later, for Rogge and his companion had been sent (much against their wishes) by the general in charge of the defence with the sole purpose of gaining time. The safety of the prisoners had not been a matter for consideration but merely a bait, by which a dozen precious hours might be won, to enable the garrison of Bremen to retreat in safety and further mines to be laid in front of the Guards. We were, therefore, fully justified in treating the embassy as a *ruse de guerre* and dealing with the ambassadors as we saw fit. The two Germans were, therefore, searched and placed in the prisoner-of-war cage for the night.

The German defence round Ostertimke, a village a mile or two on our side of the prisoner-of-war camp, having stiffened and there being no chance of liberating the camp that night, we returned to Divisional H.Q. in the pleasant farm-house at Sittingen, where our account of the embassy caused much amusement. On the way, we were hailed and stopped by Arthur who had managed

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to track us like a bloodhound from Holland, all through Germany to Celle and from there via the 30th Corps to the H.Q. of the 32nd Brigade of the Guards a few miles behind the front line. How he did it is a mystery, and little short of a miracle. I don't know which of us was the more pleased to see the other again.

Next day in the early afternoon, news came through to the Division that if we did not mind a stray shell or two and had no serious objection to being blown up on a mine, there was a good chance of getting into the prisoner-of-war camp that evening.

The security officer, kindly lent Lt. Winn and myself armoured cars, because the journey after passing Oster-timke (now in our hands) was definitely unsafe for "soft" vehicles. Headed by a tank, and with Arthur and Jimmy bringing up the rear, we first called in at Brigade H.Q. and picked up Kapitan Rogge, and then proceeded eight or ten miles down a battle-scarred road until we came to the outskirts of Ostertimke.

Lt. Winn, R.N., whom I had met for the first time the day before, had himself been a prisoner in Westertimke. He had succeeded in being sent back to England, having completely hoodwinked the German doctors as to the true state of his health—a really astonishing piece of deception, requiring courage and cunning of the highest order. As a Naval officer his official interest was the large contingent of Naval prisoners of war in the camp. and his special interest was to bring to justice one or two foul specimens of German guards with whom he had an almost personal vendetta. I was glad to find that Winn considered Rogge to be a decent fellow, so after asking for Rogge's parole, which was willingly given, we left him with Jimmy and Arthur and the "soft" transport, whilst Winn and I pushed on in armoured cars into Ostertimke. On the way we passed half a dozen tanks with their tracks blown off—the place was lousy

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with mines ; Ostertimke was not a health resort. There were loud and frequent explosions and the shells, to my surprise, burst most frequently in the air instead of digging up craters in the ground.

We left the small convoy of armoured cars in a secluded spot and paid a visit to Col. Windsor Lewis at battalion H.Q.

Windsor Lewis I knew fairly well from sport in other days, but at first I failed to recognise him, owing to a large piece of plaster over his nose which had been chipped by a bit of shell. With him, as his intelligence officer, was Lord Aberdare's son. I think they were both surprised to see me. They informed us that the chance of getting into Westertimke before the next morning was extremely small. The Colonel advised us to retreat since the village was under continuous fire. He had lost more men here, he said, than at any time since the fighting in Normandy. He promised to pass news through so that we could get into the camp at the earliest opportunity.

It was a difficult decision, but I have never thought it wise or even brave to remain unnecessarily in danger.

Down the village street came a thin stream of Germans who had surrendered. They came in twos and threes at the double and many were clearly in the last stages of exhaustion. They were not permitted to cease running, and if they showed any signs of doing so, an ugly snarl from the nearest Tommy and a raised rifle sent them off again. Beyond that, no one took much notice of them and they were collected at a corner of a field at the east of the village. For a few minutes we stood in the shelter of a lorry watching this strange sight, for up till then I had not seen many Germans in the early stages of surrendering—it was a satisfying but not a pleasant sight, for these men were desperately in fear of death.

Then, urged on by a bouquet of shells somewhat closer

than before, we turned our armoured cars, and picking up Jimmy, Arthur and Rogge, drove back 15 miles to Divisional H.Q. Here the serious problem arose of what to do with Rogge for the night. True, he was on parole, but I could hardly leave him unguarded sitting in my car in the middle of the H.Q. of the Guards Armoured Division.

I explained the position somewhat hesitatingly to the president of C Mess. Most of the officers were unwilling to allow Rogge to enter, but at last hospitality not unmixed with curiosity got the better of them. When Rogge entered he was very soon—though most politely—subjected to a fire of questions that most men are longing to ask the first intelligent German they meet. Rogge answered them all with straightforward and convincing simplicity. As Captain in a submarine in the last war he had scuttled his ship according to orders and had spent fourteen months as a prisoner of war in England.

Had he been treated well? Most certainly—he'd had nothing to complain of except the boredom of a prison camp.

Had he been pleased at the early German victories? Of course—delighted.

Why had they lost the war? Because Hitler had got meglomania and had attacked Russia.

Was he a Nazi? Yes, by necessity, but not by inclination; as a business man you could not live or trade in Germany unless you were in the Nazi party.

Did he know of the foul concentration camps? Yes, but not the full truth. Fear of the Gestapo was on everyone. Had he said a word, both he and his family would have gone there, too. Many of the victims in the camps were Germans.

No doubt Rogge made a good impression, but I was surprised when one of the senior officers offered him a spare bed in his tent.

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It was just before 5 a.m. when I was roused with the information that Westertimke camp had been liberated. I had the greatest difficulty in finding and rousing Rogge from his comfortable bed. He asked for twenty minutes to dress and shave. I informed him that I was leaving in five minutes for the camp and that he could come with me if he caught the 'bus, or he could go straight to a prisoner-of-war camp if he missed it. He caught it with difficulty, carrying most of his clothes. Most Germans are constitutionally incapable of hurrying.

It was after 7 a.m. when we reached the gates of the camp. All modern prisoner-of-war camps are built on much the same lines, and this was of the barbed wire and wooden hut variety, the regulation pattern which has been described in Chapter One.

Westertimke Camp enclosed some twenty acres and contained about 2,000 prisoners of war, mostly R.A.F. and R.N., and 4,000 merchant seamen. Outside the gate I found Lt. Winn, who had arrived about half an hour before, and, with excellent judgment and the assistance of the more responsible prisoners, had taken charge of the situation.

Generally speaking, prisoners of war are not fit to be given uncontrolled liberty—certainly not during the intense excitement which follows the liberation of a camp. Inside barbed wire, to which after several years they have become accustomed, the prisoners act like sane human beings and can be controlled with ease for their own benefit. Once outside, however, liberty goes to their heads and often all sense of responsibility departs. Even with well-trained officers this is sometimes the case, but in this camp there were, among the merchant seamen natural adventurers, who needed but the intensive criminal training of a prison camp and the excitement of liberation to stir them to any crime. Already around the camp, chicken feathers in all directions testified to the fact that the looters had not wasted their time, for during

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the previous night when the German guards had fled, a few holes had been cut in the wire (often with the assistance of passing tank crews) and some of the worst characters in the camp were now outside, looting, etc., in the neighbouring houses.

The first essential was to restore discipline and once more to make the main gate the sole exit. From somewhere—probably the old German guard-room—thirty-nine rifles were produced by Winn, and thus armed, responsible prisoners of war mounted guard over their own camp. All this time a considerable battle was going on in the neighbourhood, for shells burst from time to time unpleasantly close, and about two miles down the road to the west a village was under heavy bombardment, with smoke and flames pouring from the houses.

Many thousands of prisoners of war, dressed in every type of nondescript clothing, stood inside the wire and watched our activities with interest ; chattering, cheering and shouting questions to us.

My first job was to circulate the perimeter in my car and to make speeches to each of these groups of prisoners, threatening to place any prisoner of war who left the camp without authority last on the list for return to England. These instructions and threats were received with entire approval by the great majority, and from then till the arrival of PWX officers the next day, the camp was kept—considering the conditions—under very reasonable control.

One of our first jobs was to hoist the Union Jack which Lt. Winn had thoughtfully brought with him, before a cheering crowd of four to five thousand prisoners.

Captain Norman, the senior merchant navy officer, had for two years done a wonderful job keeping order among his rather unruly contingent with a tact and skill which won the admiration of all. His position was particularly difficult since Norman and his seamen were

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considered to be civilian prisoners and he, therefore, had neither military discipline nor any recognised regulations to support his authority—nothing but the strength of his own character.

PWX, equipped with numerous lorries and a full orderly-room staff, arrived next day and settled down in some wooden barracks outside the camp. To the general disgust of the camp leaders and of the vast majority of the prisoners themselves, the gates of the camp were thrown open and the prisoners allowed to wander round the country. From time to time shells fell in and around the camp. One of the PWX lorries was blown up, and in the American camp about half a mile away, one man was killed and half a dozen wounded.

The holes in the wire were re-opened and hundreds of prisoners looted the countryside for twenty miles around, travelling in every sort of vehicle they could commandeer—cars, motor-bicycles, horse buggies and push-bikes. They returned quite openly to the camp during the day-time carrying the loot. Incidentally someone burgled my room, stealing my Leica camera ; a severe loss, not so much owing to the value of the camera, but owing to the interesting and unique opportunities for photography I missed during the next ten days.

At night the XPWs passed in and out at will through the holes in the wire. What angered many of the prisoners was the fact that some of the villagers around had been friendly and helpful and had frequently, in times of privation, sent in food to the prisoners.

It is worthy of note that prisoners of war by no means always have unfriendly feelings towards all Germans. This attitude people in England, who have had no personal experience of Germans, find difficult to understand ; it is easy to lump all the German nation together as devils and hold each individual responsible for every



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atrocities—so difficult to draw a line between the good and the bad.

The discipline of the R.N. and the R.A.F. contingents remained, in spite of all the temptations, excellent to the end. Poor Captain Norman, however, was in despair—nearly in tears, for now for the first time in two years, through no fault of his own, he had lost control of his men. My job being to interrogate the British prisoners of war and to collect any stories of atrocities, I commandeered the only large room available. The place was filthy, the windows all broken, the floor rotten ; it was highly unsuitable for the purpose and horribly cold. To make matters worse, the wind rose and it started to rain. Nevertheless, in two days, owing to the organising ability of my clerk and with the most efficient help from Wing-Commander Willis and numerous volunteers, we interrogated 1,500 men, finishing the last batch just as forty lorries rolled into the camp to start the evacuation.

On the second day, when the weather was at its worst and the general confusion at its highest, my C.O. turned up in the camp and whisked me off to interview the camp interrogator who had been arrested hiding in the neighbourhood dressed in civilian clothes, with a loaded revolver in his pocket. He was removed under escort in a three-ton lorry belonging to PWX. The lorry had hardly departed when another three-ton lorry, also belonging to PWX, was blown up by a shell. A third and last lorry was despatched to find the first, thus rendering PWX temporarily immobile.

In this camp we found an interesting and devilish apparatus which it had been the duty of the interpreter to operate. This was a recording machine which, by means of cunningly-devised questions and a foot-operated switch, caused the innocent answers of a prisoner of war under interrogation to be applied as responses to totally different questions. Later these questions and answers were frequently put on the air as though willingly broadcast by the prisoner.

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During the three days we were in the camp parties of German prisoners came in to surrender from time to time. They were disarmed and put in the guard-room, where a crowd of ex-prisoners of war stared at them till the military police arrived to take charge. On a few occasions the German prison guards were reported as lurking in the neighbouring houses. Most of these reports had no basis in actual fact, but one report seemed to be so authentic that I went to investigate, taking two armed prisoners of war with me. I approached the house with the greatest circumspection and yelled in German that all the inmates should come out with their hands up. Nothing happened. Having no wish to expose myself by entering the house, I continued to shout in a furious manner till two terrified women appeared. Behind them I could see a man lurking in the shadows. I nearly shot him at sight, and then again nearly shot him when he came out with his hands in his pockets. He again missed death by a narrow margin, when he moved one of his hands from his head to search for his pipe. On interrogation I judged him to be a harmless lunatic and let him go back to the bosom of his weeping family.

There was plenty of food in the camp, and from the moment of our arrival we were treated as guests by W./C. Willis and the R.A.F. officers. We usually fed in one of the R.A.F. rooms on excellent Red Cross food, but in the midst of almost indescribable piggery.

Serious over-crowding is one of the greatest hardships a prisoner of war has to suffer. It is impossible to get away from your fellow men ; small idiosyncrasies become hateful, habits become maddening and even virtues are intolerable to strained nerves and thwarted ambitions ; so much so that sometimes a spell of solitary confinement in a cell, not too uncomfortable, is looked forward to by old prisoners in pleasant anticipation of some peaceful hours. Curiously enough the sex side obtrudes itself far

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less than one might expect, and although there are, of course, exceptions, sex is talked of very little among prisoners of war. The liberation of a camp and the prospect of once more meeting women stirs again dormant thoughts and makes men restless and cantankerous if their return home is long delayed.

With the prospects of leaving the camp the standard of tidiness was reduced to nil; cooking, washing up, packing and eating took place simultaneously in one ghastly jumble.

After having called, the previous evening, on the Guards Divisional H.Q. (where I had the honour and pleasure of dining with General Adair) we left Westertimke on May 2nd, heartily glad to see the last of that unpleasant and depressing place.

From the Guards I had learnt that both the 8th and the 10th Corps were advancing rapidly on Lübeck and that opposition was becoming half-hearted. It certainly looked like the beginning of the very end. I knew of one large prisoner-of-war camp in the barracks at Lübeck, but I was chiefly interested in the whereabouts of the 1,500 R.A.F. officers who, about three weeks before, had marched from Westertimke in a north-easterly direction. From Rogge I heard they had reached the Elbe, without serious hardship, for the weather had been excellent, but he had had no further news of them.

While at Sittingen, awaiting the fall of Westertimke, two officers had escaped from this column and had reached our lines. I interrogated them and learnt that the S.B.O. of their column was Group-Captain Ray, and that a large contingent of naval officers who ought to have accompanied this column had decided to remain hidden in Westertimke, where they were known as the "Underground Navy." We met this "Underground Navy" at Westertimke—they were very pleased with themselves and their success in avoiding the march to Lübeck. The fact that several score of naval officers

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could disregard German orders and hide in a few wooden huts shows clearly that when Group-Captain Ray's column left the Germans had lost serious control.

With this column had also departed a number of Germans who were "wanted" for atrocities, including those on Winn's private "black list." Among them was a fiend said to be responsible for the deaths of fifteen British officers. All sorts of rumours reached us about this man ; the last and most authentic being that he had been ambushed quite accidentally by a party of the Guards and was now a prisoner in our hands. If this were the case, he would surely have changed his name, and as far as possible his face, so that digging him out from an overcrowded camp would certainly prove a difficult task.

We left Westertimke about 8 a.m., taking with us Rogge, who for the past few days had been living with his wife in a small room next to ours at Westertimke, preparing to be a prisoner of war. It was most convenient to be able to refer to him for information now and again ; also I liked both him and his wife. We dropped him with the nearest security officer and then pushed on rapidly, reaching Luneberg about 4 p.m. Between Luneberg and the Elbe there was just one "hell-of-a-jam." Two corps were trying to go up the same road—and not a very good one at that. Luckily, at the side of the road and separated from it by a row of trees was a bicycle path just wide enough for Jeeps and my little Austin car. I therefore left Arthur and Jimmy with the lorry to come on as best they could and pushed ahead myself.

I reached the Elbe about 6 p.m., passing eight miles of treble banked transport and chased the 8th Corps H.Q. up an excellent road towards Lübeck. They were moving north almost as fast as I was, and it was not till after midnight that I ran them to earth in the village of Lanau, some twenty miles south of Lübeck, after nearly

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fourteen hours of continuous driving. Our forward troops I was told, had just got into Lübeck. At first I thought of pushing farther on that night, but the military situation was obscure. Large bodies of German troops had been left behind far to the south of our advanced guards. Most of them were eager to surrender, but some of them were still fighting. Previously that evening, when taking a short cut along a lonely road, I had met 2,000 fully-armed Germans marching in excellent order with an officer at their head. In the dusk I had taken them for British soldiers till it was too late to turn. It was a nasty shock when I realised who they were. However, I breathed a short prayer, hooted the hooter and they made way for me to pass. All the fight had gone out of them—all they desired was to surrender to the British or Americans, but not to the Russians.

From this time and for the next few days Germans intent on surrendering were a common sight. Every hour one passed not only hundreds but thousands—some armed and some not, but all perfectly harmless. One took no notice of them except to roar at them if they got in the way. All things considered, I thought a journey in the dark to Lübeck might be a bit tricky, so I found a corner among the tables in a little dark café, lit by a couple of candles, and slept till 4.30 in spite of the tramp of army boots around my ears. Before turning in I found out by chance that our tanks had come across a large number of R.A.F. officer prisoners of war that afternoon, living in farm-houses in the woods south of Lübeck, and obtained a rough location of the camp. It seemed to me pretty certain that this was the party which had been marched away from Westertimke some three weeks before.

From 5 a.m. onwards that day I passed Germans by the thousand coming in to surrender. I stopped the car once and called out to three of them who were marching past :

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"Come here." They came willingly. "Where are you off to?"

"We want to surrender."

"Right. There are some British soldiers up the road."

"We've tried that, but the Tommies just say 'get on' " (*raus*).

"Well, 'get on.' "

"Have we far to go?"

"Yes . . . the hell of a long way. . . . Keep on walking southwards."

"*Danke schön*."

So the poor devils went on. German soldiers who are not under the orders of someone are always rather pitiful objects. They are like lost souls, earnestly desiring someone to take charge of them—the devil being better than no one.

After a two-hour search I found some R.A.F. prisoner-of-war officers in a village, who boarded my car and led me deep into the woods where 1,500 R.A.F. officers were leading boy-scout existences in two huge farm-houses. These were the men who had marched from Westertimke. The S.B.O. was Group-Captain Ray, who early in the month had taken charge of the expedition and had issued instructions against escaping in accordance with General Eisenhower's "stay-put" order. Only about thirty R.A.F. had disregarded these instructions, and most, if not all of them, had reached our lines. For the first fifteen days of the march the weather had been lovely and the 1,500 men had honestly enjoyed the experience of relative freedom after long confinement in barbed wire enclosures. They had become healthy and fit and soon thought nothing of cooking and sleeping in the open round camp fires on the warm summer nights. Nominally they were under the command of the commandant from Westertimke, but already they looked to Ray for orders. On the afternoon of the 15th it started to rain heavily and Ray told his commandant that his men had no intention of sleeping in the open. In spite

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of the almost hysterical protests of the Germans, Ray ordered his men to scatter and to find billets in the neighbouring villages. As the commandant saw his prisoners melt away down every road and path on the route he was in terrible distress—he felt he would never see them again, but dared not order the German guards to open fire. If he had done so the massacre of a few dozen prisoners would have resulted, but there were insufficient guards to control the straggling column.

“All the men will parade at X village at 10 a.m. to-morrow,” said Ray, but the German did not believe it and had thoughts of shooting himself.

At 10 a.m. the next day not a single man was missing. The prisoners of war had been excellently fed, housed and entertained by the villagers. No one had had any difficulty in finding a billet, and I believe all payment was refused. When one hears such stories one can no longer be surprised that most old prisoners of war refuse to include all Germans under one anathema.

The German commandant, intensely surprised at the return of his prisoners, henceforth gratefully passed over command of the column to Ray. As they approached Lübeck, Ray sent forward a reconnaissance party to report on the conditions in the big barracks above the town. He learnt that they were filthy and overcrowded with French prisoners of war, and quite firmly refused to go there. But now he was in complete control, so he turned eastwards into the woods south of Lübeck and commandeered two enormous farm-houses about two miles apart. There was, of course, no barbed wire and the German guards, who accompanied rather than escorted them, made no serious attempt to guard the camp. Owing to their experiences on their march, the prisoners were fully capable of fending for themselves in the open. In the meadows around the farms they dug holes in the ground, which they lined with straw. Over these holes

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they improvised tents and slept, for preference, out of doors. They cooked most efficiently on ingenious forms of camp cookers made usually from earth and tins. In the bad weather they retired to shelter in the barns. It was thus I found them—hundreds of them—cooking breakfast in the open ; healthy, well fed, rather dirty, and in an astonishing medley of costumes, but for prisoners of war, singularly sane, competent, and self-respecting human beings. They were their own masters, obeying the “stay-put” order of Eisenhower. Two days before they had cheered our tanks and entertained the tank crews as they had passed through to Lübeck. Now large numbers of prisoners of war were circulating freely in the district in various commandeered conveyances from the surrounding villages. I may add that the prisoners of war drove these borrowed vehicles in a highly dangerous manner, frequently forgetting the fact that in Germany the rule of the road is to drive on the right.

One of the first prisoners I met in this camp was a huge man with a great red beard. He stated that he was my old friend, that excellent cricketer, Aden Crawley. He was quite unrecognisable. Later I saw Wing-Commander Braham and many other famous R.A.F. pilots.

A very good orderly-room had already been organised where nominal rolls and other necessary documents were being prepared. Papers, reports, and eye-witnesses' stories on atrocities had already been collected and were in first-class order. So feeling there was little for me to do, I left, after a stay of a couple of hours, for the big prisoner-of-war camp in the barracks at Lübeck.

Lübeck district was an extraordinary sight that day. On every road, in every street, and in many of the fields were columns, convoys, and masses of German soldiers, either already prisoners or attempting to surrender. There seemed to be far more German soldiers in Lübeck



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than British, and they were by no means always unarmed. Many times I saw a column of Germans marching three abreast up the road in perfect order with their packs and full equipment on their backs and an officer at their head. For the most part they looked neither starved nor desperately tired, but they had been given the order to surrender, and they were obeying this order with the same patient discipline as they would have obeyed an order to die heroically at their posts. I certainly saw 200,000 surrendering Germans that day.

Beside the autobahn which runs round Lübeck to the west was a field where some 30,000 Germans, packed close but gradually sorting themselves out, were digging latrines, erecting little improvised tents and making cooking stoves—all, no doubt, according to German Army regulations.

The Germans are an extraordinary race. I feel sure that no other army could surrender *en masse* in such good order, with such superb discipline and with so few signs of despondency.

That night I returned to the camp at Trenthorst after touring round Lübeck in the vain hope of "acquiring" a Leica camera to replace the one which was stolen from me at Westertimke. It was maddening to see so many unique subjects for photography, to possess films, but to have no camera.

That night Jimmy and Arthur turned up with the lorry, having faithfully tracked me down by some means known only to themselves. They had had a terrible journey up, including being shot at by a German jet-propelled aircraft as they crossed the Elbe.

A PWX officer had by this time reached the camp, and the next day the whole lot of 1,500 R.A.F. officers were evacuated in lorries to Luneberg, whence we followed at our leisure.

The night of May 4th—the night of the surrender of North-West Germany—I spent with the 8th Corps H.Q.

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and was in B Mess in a small château when the news came through. On the top floor were some fifty German refugees, mainly women, and Major Peters and I, after drinking a glass of wine to victory, decided it would be interesting to go upstairs and break the news.

"Der Krieg ist zu ende" (the war is over), shouted Peters.

Immediately an excited and questioning crowd pressed round us. At first there was unalloyed rejoicing by all. "Is it really peace. Can we go back to our homes? . . . What are the terms?"

"It is unconditional surrender by Germany to the United Nations," said Peters.

"What? Not unconditional surrender to the Russians?" asked one girl of twenty, with horror and dismay in her voice.

"Of course. To the United Nations—the Russians are one of the United Nations," said Peters.

It is curious to record that among the civil population of Germany there persisted a strong belief, for which their own propaganda was responsible, that the British and Americans would immediately fight the Russians if they met them. It was their last hope, and it died hard.

Thereafter they questioned us on their chances of getting home. Many of their homes were in the Ruhr and they seemed unable to realise that most of these were by now but heaps of rubble.

Luneberg, we found, was a pleasant town, and Captain Gray and I billeted ourselves most comfortably on a German family who lived in a large house in the woods on the northern outskirts.

I was sitting in the drawing-room (which we had commandeered) smoking a pipe of peace and waiting for dinner when a pretty German girl came racing through the bushes which surrounded the house, crying out to us to come and save her family from the Russians.

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On questioning her she told us that five drunken Russians from a Russian prisoner-of-war camp in the neighbourhood had invaded the house and might at any moment do literally anything. Gray and I looked at each other—we did not fancy the job. Was it really our business to protect the Germans from our allies? But after some talk we girded on revolvers and taking with us a couple of N.C.O.s, one of whom spoke Russian, wandered through the bushes to a house some two hundred yards away. The nearer we got the less we liked the prospect. In the house we found five Russians moderately drunk and seeking more drink. They were in a dangerous mood; tough, fierce men who had suffered much as prisoners of war during the past four years. Part of that time they had worked long hours on these very farms and had been half starved, and now they were out to get what they could. Drink was the first necessity, then women; and after that perhaps revenge, but they had clearly not made up their minds about the full programme. When any German came near them they snarled at them and the women fled. There was only one doddery old German man in the place.

For an hour and a half we fraternised with these Russians; we shook hands with them, we drank out of the same bottle, we kissed them, and finally edged them out of the house. To our surprise, they departed. Several times the situation had looked so ugly that I had wondered what Gray and I should do (should we use our guns?) if the Russians had decided suddenly to rape all the women.

Later I learnt that around us, hiding in the bushes and watching us, were a dozen Russians—many of them armed. I fancy none of us would have got out alive if shooting had started or even if we had fingered a revolver. When the Russians had gone I went back to the house and told the Germans to clear out with what baggage they could carry, leaving the doors open. I prophesied that the Russians, who certainly believed there was drink

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in the place, would return that night. I said that if this happened we were not prepared to protect them again. The Germans took our advice. Two nights later the Russians returned and looted the place mildly ; thereafter they left it alone.

Two very pleasant days of peace followed. We visited friends, practised revolver shooting with the new Luger revolver which I had "acquired," called on PWX at 2nd Army H.Q. in the hopes that they had some information concerning our prisoners of war still in occupied Russian territory (they had none) and listened to accounts of the interrogation of some famous German generals who were residing temporarily at Luneberg.

Then Major Johnston turned up on a visit from our H.Q. still in Holland and issued specific instructions. We were to keep a close look-out for a large number of ex-prisoners of war who might come through from Russian territory at any moment. I pondered on these orders for a day or two, then, as the only probable camp from which these ex-prisoners of war could come was Luft I at Barth, I decided to pay a visit to the 6th Airborne Division at Wismar.

There seemed no object in taking Arthur and the lorry, so, leaving him with my old friends 83 Group (main H.Q.), R.A.F., Jimmy and I set out early. It was a lovely day, the roads were comparatively empty—very different from our first journey from Luneberg to the Elbe—and passing through Launenberg and Schwerin, we reached Wismar about 1 p.m. on May 10th, after a pleasant four-hour run.

Two points struck us as interesting on this journey. One was the really incredible mess of German transport in all stages of disintegration near Boitzenberg, just north of the Elbe.

The second was the remarkably efficient way in which the Americans were making use of German prisoner-of-war labour in clearing up a very messy battleground a

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few miles south of Schwerin. Many thousands of Germans were being employed, working under their own N.C.O.s, driving their own lorries and tractors with only a few American sentries keeping a casual eye on their activities. There was no fear that they would escape—that is the last thing the Germans desired to do. A few days later, when again we passed that way, the countryside was clean and tidy—not an atom of paper, not a burnt-out lorry to be seen.

The D.A.A.G. of the 6th Airborne Division was kind enough to give me lunch and also some information which interested me immensely. The Russians in this district had apparently no objection to anyone who wished passing through their barrier and circulating in their territory. Visits official and unofficial were paid by Russians and British to each other's units and a number of men had got gloriously drunk. The whole atmosphere was very friendly. Two N.C.O.s and an officer had actually taken a jeep as far as the prisoner-of-war camp at Barth and had returned with ease, stating that there were some 800 R.A.F. and many thousand American airmen still in the camp awaiting evacuation. The D.A.A.G. saw no reason why I should not go through to Barth. He gave me a chit which ran something as follows :

“ S./L. Evans is authorised to pass the barriers and proceed as far as Barth and return.”

He offered to lend me the two N.C.O.s who had previously been to Barth to act as guides.

I decided to go that afternoon. At 4 p.m., led by the jeep and accompanied by an American major, who said his job was to investigate atrocities, we moved off towards the barriers only about a mile down the road. Our chit brought us quickly through the British barrier (just a weighted pole across the road), and then, after moving through No Man's Land for a few hundred yards, we had our first view of the Russians. Their barrier was a far more impressive affair. They had erected a wooden

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arch across the road, all covered with red bunting, with a hammer and sickle, picked out in silver paint from a red background, at the apex. Across the road was the usual counterweighted telegraph pole, such as one sees at level crossings, but covered with bright red cloth. Two or three tough-looking soldiers in their olive green uniforms stood near the arch with tommy-guns over their backs. At the side was a small telephone booth. They signalled us to stop and the convoy halted.

I produced the "pass" which had on it the stamp of the 6th Airborne Division and insisted on shaking hands with the Russian sergeant. More Russians came up from a hut at the side of the road and crowded round my car. One shouted to the man at the telephone booth, who proceeded to telephone or made a good pretence of doing so. To enliven matters I said "Hitler!", which everyone understood, and then made signs that between us we had swept him off the face of the earth. This gesture was received with enthusiasm, and almost immediately afterwards the barrier was lifted, and with signals of friendship we passed over into Russian territory.

Compared to our side of the line the country was almost deserted. There was no one working in the fields and very little traffic on the roads, although there were a few parties of Germans who had been refused passage into our territory treking back towards their villages.

Coming in the other direction (towards our lines) were the same mixture of Poles and French and other nationalities as could be seen on any of the roads throughout Germany—the displaced persons. For the first fifty miles there were very few Russians and no military transport of any kind except, rather rarely, the two-horse four-wheeler buggies which appeared to be the Russian officers' substitute for a staff car. The number of German inhabitants in the villages were far below normal,

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but those we saw seemed to be going quite happily and undisturbed about their business. We saw no signs of looting or burning or brutalities, and many of the houses, though uninhabited and locked, had still lace curtains and china figures in the windows.

All the Russians we saw throughout the trip were strictly sober ; it was a dull, uninteresting journey, but we made good progress on excellent roads.

Rostock, through which we passed without trouble, was a fairly busy town, in which Russian soldiers and the inhabitants were circulating in a normal manner. Many of the Russians wore the silver Stalingrad medal. Down by the water-front the town has been badly damaged, but on the outskirts were several enormous blocks of very fine workmen's flats, untouched as far as we could see.

About 7 p.m., after losing our way and getting on to some terrible roads, we reached Barth camp. I felt that we might once more have been approaching Westertimke, for the camp was on the same model.

As we came through Barth we saw many ex-prisoners of war strolling about the town—mostly Americans—and several German cars with U.S.A. painted on them parked outside an hotel. It was clear that the same use of their liberty was being made here by the prisoners of war as at Westertimke and Trenthorst. Prisoners of war, as soon as they are liberated, cannot resist the urge to commandeer any vehicle they find, and drive it round the countryside.

The main gate to the R.A.F. compound was open and our convoy pulled up amidst an excited crowd opposite the first wooden building inside the gate. I was immediately taken in to see Group-Captain Green, famous as the man who first reported a German tank attack westwards across the base of the Cherbourg peninsular, and later was the first to report the German attempt to break out through the Falaise Gap.

Green was in command of 850 R.A.F. and

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Group-Captain Weir was acting as senior staff officer to an American colonel, who was senior officer in the camp. The Russians, I learnt from these two, were extremely friendly and had immediately offered to send into the camp 1,000 pigs. This was overdoing it, but fifty pigs were accepted gratefully as a first instalment. Otherwise the Russians had not interfered in any way in the running of the camp except to encourage the prisoners of war to enter the towns and villages around and to amuse themselves with wine and women. This offer had been accepted gratefully by the Americans, but the R.A.F., in consequence of the "stay-put" order, had been kept in pretty stern control by their officers. In fact the gates to the R.A.F. compound had been kept closed till a very drunken Russian, firing off his tommy-gun in a dangerous manner, had insisted on the gates being opened.

For several days after the liberation of the camp there had been a grand "drunk" in the district, followed by a lot of looting, but now all had quietened down, though the camp was restless and dissatisfied. The prisoners of war had been told that the evacuation of the camp had been discussed between high-standing British and Russian officers and hopes had been raised many times, only to be shattered. Nothing had happened—the general belief being that the Russians, who had promised to provide transport, had none to spare. Weir and Green stated that in their opinion discipline and obedience to the "stay-put" order could not be maintained much longer. Everybody in the camp knew there was no difficulty in escaping and reaching the British lines, and rebellious parties were already being formed to do so. I was asked how long I intended to stay. "Till everyone is evacuated from this camp," I answered without hesitation.

Weir and Green were delighted. No doubt the knowledge, quickly passed round, that someone from the outside world intended to stay with them till the end<sup>\*</sup> greatly



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assisted morale. Of the 7,000 Americans about 750 were already missing, but of the 850 British only about thirty. What infuriated everyone, however, was the fact that those prisoners of war, who had disobeyed the "stay-put" order and had reached our lines, had been treated as heroes and sent home by air.

Group-Captain Weir decided to depart that night for the British lines in a stolen German car and to try to see General Dempsey of the 2nd Army. It was arranged that I should sleep in Green's room and to do all I could to assist him in maintaining discipline in the camp. The R.A.F. in this camp were a magnificent lot of men, though nothing but Green's outstanding personality could have kept control in such circumstances.

Next day, at his request, I visited many of the huts, making short speeches and answering innumerable questions as well as I could. There had been a rumour at the 6th Airborne Division that Field-Marshal Montgomery and Rokossovski were meeting that day to discuss the evacuation. This sounded to me highly improbable, but I passed on the rumour for what it was worth with excellent results, so that many who were planning to escape decided to remain. In fact there were no more escapes, and morale and discipline were wholly restored.

With the help of an excellent orderly-room which had inherited the whole equipment of the German Commandeure, my interrogation was accomplished easily and completely. I even had time to interrogate four of the censorship girls who had been left behind when the Germans had fled.

There was a large aerodrome about two miles away from our camp where remnants of German jet planes had been found. Next day we paid them a visit, and on the way passed a small but horrible Nazi concentration camp where the unfortunate prisoners had been slowly starved to death. After the concentration camp had been

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liberated and cleared by the Russians, some of the nearly dying inmates had been brought up to our hospital in the prisoner-of-war camp. I visited some of these poor wretches, many of whom were too far gone for any hope of recovery, and several of them died while I was at the camp.

That day I sent the two N.C.O.s back with a letter concerning conditions in the camp, and the following day (May 12th) a letter arrived—by what means I have no idea—from Group-Captain Weir with the incredible news that aircraft were coming to evacuate the camp and would arrive about midday. We hardly believed it, but the excitement was intense, and the prisoners of war, lying about half nude in the sand, anxiously watched the sky to the west.

That morning Green held a parade and a march past of the whole of the R.A.F. In the circumstances, a full parade, the hoisting of the colours, and a march past to music was a remarkable effort of discipline, never to be forgotten. Several thousand American airmen watched it from their compound ; some with mockery, but more with envy and admiration.

About midday the first plane was seen ; by 4 p.m. forty Flying Fortresses had landed on the aerodrome and by 8 p.m. all but fifty-nine of the R.A.F. had departed. It was like a miracle.

Proceedings were held up for nearly two hours because the first two Fortresses got bogged at the side of the concrete perimeter, thus blocking everything, and no tractors or ropes could be found of adequate strength to deal with the situation.

Numerous Russians turned up and watched with interest, but took no part in the proceedings except to shake hands and wish everyone luck. They were very friendly.

Next morning the remainder of the R.A.F. and the whole American contingent paraded at 4 a.m. and marched down to the aerodrome.

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Fortresses poured down from the sky and by 10 a.m. Jimmy and I were left in sole possession of the camp.

There was not much loot worth having, but what there was we felt to be indisputably ours. We picked up a couple of good German typewriters, a few thousand cigarettes, a dozen Red Cross parcels and a few other oddments, and departed rather sadly, feeling lonely and deserted. The journey back was without incident.

After calling on the 6th Airborne Division at Wismar we drove on through Schwerin and reached our billet at Luneberg, weary but well satisfied with the adventure.

## II

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THE miraculous evacuation of Luft I at Barth left, in the opinion of Second Army (Rear H.Q.), but one camp in Russian territory containing any considerable number of British and U.S.A. prisoners of war. The conditions in the camp were believed to be bad and the numbers between one and two thousand, but information was vague in the extreme. No one had been able to visit the camp since the capitulation and all communications had ceased for many months. Discussions had been in progress for some time, I was informed, at a high level between the British and the Americans and the Russians for the evacuation of this camp, but so far, whatever had been decided, the result had been nil. Why it should be necessary for Generals and even, it was rumoured, Field Marshals, to stoop so low as to discuss the movement of a couple of thousand

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men one hundred miles by lorry, was a little difficult to understand. It was using a sledge hammer to crack a nut—the most remarkable thing about the whole affair being that the nut showed no visible signs of cracking.

As I learnt later, the hold up was in no way due to lack of enthusiasm on the part of Second Army H.Q.

I tentatively suggested to the authorities that I should go through the lines and find out the truth. Rather to my surprise I received every sort of unofficial encouragement to do so. Officially no one seemed to be able to secure an adequate pass, and the higher up you were in the hierarchy, the more chance there was of causing an international incident by an infringement of somewhat nebulous regulations. Many contacts had been made with the Russians in the borderline towns and at first sight one would have imagined that it was the easiest thing in the world to obtain, from the extremely friendly Russians, accurate information about conditions in a town a hundred miles away. But here an unexpected difficulty arose. The Russians were too friendly. Before any business could be discussed Russian hospitality decreed that you had a meal at which numerous toasts were proposed. At each toast about half a glass of neat vodka had to drunk, "no heel taps." Without giving offence, there was no way of avoiding this ceremony and our ambassadors, perhaps somewhat out of training owing to shortage of whisky and gin over the last few months, seldom or never stood up to the test sufficiently to conduct negotiations in a coherent manner. The truth lay at the bottom of a well of vodka.

From Second Army I went to my old friends, 83rd Group, Main H.Q., for advice and help, it being absolutely necessary to get a "phoney" pass of some description from somewhere which, if the worst occurred, would compromise nobody that mattered. A friend of mine co-operated with enthusiasm and

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we drafted out quite an impressive document signed with a flamboyant signature and stamped with rubber stamps.

Next morning Jimmy and I and George set off in the P.U. for the American 18th Corps H.Q. at Hagenow. George was an Ukrainian Russian who had lived all his life in Canada and was completely bi-lingual in Russian and English. I borrowed him from Captain Gray's section, because I thought a good Russian interpreter might come in useful if we got into a jam. Normally I do not like working through an interpreter, for one is apt to loose track of what is going on. An inexperienced interpreter is inclined to answer questions and enter on explanations on his own, and if his explanations don't happen to tally with one's own, the results may be dangerous. George being rather bored with cooking was willing to come, but I think he was very glad when we were safely back.

At Hagenow I called in on Colonel Shellhammer and learnt that he had been responsible for sending the Forts into Barth. When I told him that I was an R.A.F. officer who had got into Barth, we metaphorically fell on each other's necks. He promised me all possible help if I should decide to try and get through to Neu Brandenburg, and advised me to call on Col. Ireland of the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division at Ludwigslust. Col. Ireland was out, but his highly competent understudy, Lt. Mason, was extremely encouraging and fixed up a bed for me in the hospital on the neighbouring aerodrome. There was a small ex-prisoner-of-war camp there he told me, to which ex-prisoners of war escapers came through from time to time. With any luck one might pick up news of the Neu Brandenburg camp.

At Ludwigslust we found a section of the International Red Cross, enthusiastic but inexperienced, for only lately had they arrived from England and still were almost without stores or transport. There was also a section of

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PWX whose official job it is to be first into liberated prisoner-of-war camps. Through no fault of their own they were unable to get official permission to enter Russian territory. That night we had a real stroke of luck. An escaper, an American sergeant, came through from Neu Brandenburg. He had left the camp contrary to the "stay put" order which had been issued to all our prisoner-of-war camps by General Eisenhower, and had taken five days crossing the hundred miles of Russian territory between Neu Brandenburg and our lines. He was in good shape and when interviewed on Monday night, was able to give information which, if a little vague, was at any rate authentic. When he left, there were over a thousand British and U.S. men in the camp, though some might have escaped in the meantime. There were many sick (estimated at 200) and swarms of other nationalities. He reported also that food was low and conditions of life unpleasant. The sergeant had found no difficulty in walking through the country and had obtained food sometimes from Russians, who were very friendly, but more often from the Germans. Except for refugees, he said, there was little traffic on the roads and he was convinced that no one would stop us if we pushed through into the Russian lines.

Next morning I telephoned to Col. Shellhammer and told him that I had decided to go, and asked him for trucks and ambulances. "What do you want?" he asked. I suggested a recce of two 2½-ton lorries and two ambulances. Later I heard through Col. Ireland that they would be at my disposal at 2.15 on the aerodrome. From then until our departure we were beset with trouble aggravated by a couple of punctures at a time when we most needed my car.

Major Lee Warner of the International Red Cross, with a 15-cwt. lorry, 30,000 cigarettes and a few other comforts, said he would like to come, too. We got a pass through the American lines and at 3.30 on May 16th our convoy of six vehicles pushed off in good order towards the

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barriers. I led the expedition, driving my P.U. with Jimmy as navigator. Then followed two big trucks covered with Red Crosses and American flags, the rear being brought up by Lee Warner's 15-cwt. lorry and the two ambulances. Passing swiftly through the American barrier by means of my correct official pass, we approached the Russian barrier and proceeded to put my "phoney" pass to its first test. There were half a dozen Russians and none of them could speak English, so George was employed to enquire about routes whilst the pass was examined right side up and upside down and finally handed back with a respectful salute and permission to proceed. It is far better to have nothing in Russian written on the pass; if there is, the sentry may expect to find also a Russian stamp and become curious about its absence.

The route from Ludwisglust to Grabow is on the road to Berlin, but a tedious and cross-country journey was necessary before hitting the main road through Malchov and Waren, to Neu Brandenburg. Navigation was made much more difficult by the fact that in nearly all cases the German sign-posts have been removed and Russian ones substituted in their place. In due course Jimmy and I learnt that "Rostock" looked like "Poctok," and so on, but we had a horrid feeling that if we ever lost our way we should never find it again. However, with some luck and the appearance of German sign-posts at two critical moments, we at length came to the main road at Parkim, and thereafter made good progress via Flau and Karow as far as Malchow. Again we noticed that the countryside appeared almost deserted compared with our side of the line; there were few Germans to be seen—sad, solemn-faced people it seemed to me, usually in the back yards of their houses, and no one was working in the fields.

The second thing one noticed in Russian territory is that no one had yet attempted to tidy up the battlefield. Dead horses, vile smells and litter of every description

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insulted the countryside. Burnt-out cars still remained in the middle of the road where they had been smashed, for there were no busy bulldozers here to push them off. But their presence hardly impeded the military traffic, for there was practically none ; what traffic there was consisted either of the German standard farm cart drawn by two horses (the outfit no doubt having been commandeered) or a two-horse four-wheeled buggy (Russian officers, for the use of) which was by far the commonest official vehicle on the roads in Russian territory. In the villages a flag hung from every inhabited house—a red flag, if the Russians had taken over, otherwise a white flag such as we saw, though less universally, on our side of the line. One passed a few Russian soldiers on the road, either officers in their two-horse buggies—with the officer frequently asleep in the back—or soldiers rather unskilfully riding bicycles, mostly on the wrong side of the road. In most villages there were small groups of Russian soldiers, a dozen or so to a village, sitting lazily on the doorsteps in the sun. They seemed to have little contact with the few remaining Germans. These Russians, with few exceptions, were hard-faced, tough looking fellows, many with a distinctly Mongolian cast of face, mostly armed with sub-machine guns which they carried even when they bicycled. There was a fair sprinkling of young boys among them. For some reason these men gave me an odd creepy feeling. They seem like strange creatures from another world, unknown and unknowable. However, though some looked up with surprise, which may even have been hostile, most of them took no notice whatever of our passing convoy. We were told later by the forward troops of our Airborne Division that the first Russians with whom they came in contact, the front line Russian tommy gunners, were the fiercest, toughest human beings they had ever seen—and our Airborne tommy gunners were pretty tough themselves.

The troops who now rather sparsely occupied the land



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were the ordinary infantry, milk and water compared with those who had first entered the villages, driving flocks of German refugees before them. These refugees having been forbidden to pass through our lines, were now streaming back eastwards to their homes which as far as I could see, were unlooted and undamaged. They were by far the most numerous travellers on the roads, and travelled mostly in the ordinary long German farm-carts, drawn by two, or sometimes three horses. Above the cart they usually erected a tent, running on a pole above the length of the cart and women, children and old men sat crowded under cover on top of piles of luggage. Often we passed as many as a dozen of these carts in a string, plodding slowly along, or camped at the side of the road. The women had sad, tired faces and the men usually refused to look at us or, if they did, gave us a defiant glance. I never saw the Russians interfere in any way with all this prospective loot. We passed a few herds of cattle being driven eastwards by Russian soldiers on horseback and from time to time we saw fields in which large herds were overcrowded. The rest of the countryside was deserted.

At Malchow we found the bridge still under repair and had to make a long detour over a dreadful road. I stopped and asked the way from a German in the town. The first I asked spoke an unintelligible dialect, but a young man came up, dressed in civilian trousers and a grey sweater with a red band round his arm.

"Are the British or the Americans coming here?" he whispered to me, glancing as he did so over his shoulder—a habit people get when near the Gestapo or the OGPU. I repeated my question and he gave me directions quickly and efficiently and then again asked his former question with urgency. I told him that as far as I knew, "no." "Are you having a bad time?" (*gehts schlecht bei Ihnen*) I whispered back. "Yes," he answered, "pretty grim," and we moved on.

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There was no joy in the faces of any of the Germans. They were most certainly learning the feelings of a conquered nation, but I saw no ill treatment.

At every important cross road in the Russian area there was a girl traffic regulator doing the work of our military policemen. For uniform they wore high boots, black skirts to below the knee, Russian tunics, and they were all bareheaded or wore streamlined forage caps. They were mostly small and stocky and well-built and though rather hard faced, not unattractive. They took their work most seriously and stood rigidly to attention with a flag in either hand—one red and one yellow. There was a peculiar drill with the flags which I never understood. One was, of course, supposed to indicate to the girl which way one wished to turn. If one did this the girl responded by a series of quick movements with the flags, like an automatic toy, finishing with one hand flag across the breast, from which one presumed that one had leave to pass. Unfortunately, when map reading on a detour with all the signs in unreadable Russian letters, we frequently had to halt for a moment or two in an undecided manner, or still worse, we sometimes changed our minds. This always infuriated the girls who unbent sufficiently to curse us. It did not pacify one girl in the least when I laughed and nodded to her as we passed. However, no harm was done, and in any case, there was hardly enough traffic to be worth regulating.

Half way through the detour we came on one of the dustiest roads on which it has ever been my lot to drive in convoy. Blocking our progress was one of the big Russian two-purpose anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, drawn by a clanking, antiquated lorry. As a dust raiser it was beyond belief. Visibility was reduced to a couple of yards and we crawled along nearly suffocated. There was no chance of passing in that dust and on that awful road, apart from which the gun swung like a pendulum

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from side to side in a most dangerous manner. I have come to the conclusion, after driving nearly a thousand miles through their territory, that Russians have a generic dislike to being passed by any car which has not an outsize siren. They drive consistently on the left hand side of the road and many times, after repeated attempts to pass, I found it safer after making a few feints to the left, to pass a lorry on the right. On several occasions I am sure Russian lorry drivers attempted to push us into the ditch. The experienced American lorry drivers in my convoy fully agreed with this view. When we had a brief halt on the main road after finishing the detour, one of them said as he dug the dust out of his eyes with his finger nails, "That's the most blanky blanky drive I've ever had. God ! I'd rather stay here than do it again."

In a little smashed-up village to the west of Neu Brandenburg the convoy halted down a side road whilst I sought a German from whom to make enquiries. This manœuvre agitated the sentry who, instead of the usual girl, was directing the traffic of about one lorry per five minutes, so that he nearly pulled his tommy gun on us. I found we had been wrongly informed as to the position of the camp and was eagerly re-directed by a German who seemed to welcome us as a friend and ally, so keen was he to help. This friendliness was universal amongst the Germans I spoke to in Russian territory and to a slightly lesser extent, this is equally true of Germans on our side of the line. Never once have I been mis-directed by a German, and I have asked information of hundreds. How very different was the attitude of the French and Belgians during the German occupation of their country. Mis-directing, especially in Paris, was one of the minor sports and no doubt was an immense relief to pent-up feelings. My driver and I have travelled nearly two thousand miles through Germany, mostly unaccompanied and practically unarmed, and have experienced no act which could be

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considered hostile—we can report that the “natives appear friendly.” Also, as opposed to the French and Belgians (who have no knowledge of local geography, but no hesitation in pretending they have), the Germans usually know the way and direct you efficiently and quickly.

It was nearly 8 p.m. when we rolled into Neu Brandenburg, and for the first time we created something of a sensation. This town is rather bashed about, mainly (the ex-prisoners of war told me) by German dive bombers after its capture by the Russians, but it was the first town in Russian lines we saw a town really full of troops. No one stopped us, and, as we passed through we saw on the hill to the north, the big blocks of German barracks which proved to be the prisoner-of-war camp. Soon we met the first ex-prisoners of war. They were of all nationalities it seemed, the French predominating—dressed in every sort of nondescript garment. They seemed dazed and uncertain, but a few clambered aboard the lorries and led us up a dirt track to the steep bumpy water-course of a road which leads to the camp. It was getting dark as we came through an open gate in the wire and across trampled dirty sand to the first block. Similar barracks are to be seen in most towns in Germany—half a dozen huge three-storied red brick buildings with attics above, spaced out regularly with perhaps fifty yards between each block.

Thousands of prisoners of war crowded round the cars with rather feeble cheers, but laughing and jostling and fingering everything in the mannerless way of those who for years have lived bored and aimless lives. As nearly all prisoners of war are, by intensive training, bold and accomplished thieves, we set an armed guard on the lorries and leaving Jimmy with the P.U., went to find the Senior Officer of the camp. We were ushered into a big, bare, dirty room where a conference seemed to be going on. I made out some half a dozen

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Russians sitting on wooden chairs round a man at a table and putting questions to him through an interpreter who spoke moderate English. The man at the table answered very calmly in a pleasant American voice. After listening, apparently un-noticed, whilst it grew rapidly darker, I gathered that the Russian colonel and his staff were investigating the disappearance of a number of Red Cross parcels at the time of the liberation on April 28th. It seems that some had been taken by the Russians, but most of them, I learnt later, had been looted by the French. I regret to state that as prisoners of war the French were not popular, even among the Russians.

Suddenly the conference came to an end and in the semi-darkness I bowed and shook hands with each Russian in turn, and someone introduced me as the English officer in charge of the convoy.

The American at the table proved to be Colonel Hughes, the senior officer of the camp. We spoke a word or two together, but the Russians intimated clearly that I was to come with them into the next room. Someone lit a hurricane lamp, and we trooped into the passage.

On the way I found that one of the staff officers talked French, and the subsequent conversation was carried on in that language. As we sat down on benches round the lamp I was glad to see that Lee Warner had pushed his way to my side. I felt very grateful for his support, for I was by no means happy about what was coming. This posset of high Russian officers was not what we had expected or desired to find, for my credentials would not bear a moment's serious examination. Luckily no one, from the time we came into the camp till the time we left, asked anyone to produce a pass or a paper of any sort.

At this conference I was no doubt taken as a perfectly genuine emissary of the British and American military authorities. I was asked my rank, where we had entered

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the Russian territory, what towns we had passed through, and how long the journey had taken. I gathered they wished to find out whether we had been "swanning" about the countryside, and I gave correct answers which appeared to satisfy them. Next we were asked exactly why we had come and exactly what we wanted. We had come on a reconnaissance, I said, first to find out how many American and British prisoners there were in the camp, and to remove those who were seriously sick. Secondly we desired to get permission from the Russians to send in lorries to evacuate the whole camp as rapidly as possible. We were told that arrangements would take time, for, owing to the military traffic on the roads, such a large convoy would have to be routed with care. This we knew to be bilge, for there was practically no traffic on the roads. I suggested that we should send in, perhaps, thirty lorries per day to avoid congestion. They said they would refer this proposal to Rokossovski at Moscow.

I asked if there were many R.A.F. in the camp, because, I said, I was especially interested, being an aviator of the last war—and too old to fight seriously in this—and touched my bald head. This pleased the Russian colonel, who was also getting a little thin on the top and had also been an aviator in the last war. We stood up, bowed to each other and shook hands. I took this opportunity of asking that my convoy might take back what sick they could with them. After some conversation among themselves permission for this was granted. I was then asked rather abruptly whether my proposal to send in British lorries was because we thought the Russians had not got sufficient. I did not know the diplomatic answer to this, but possibly my answer was a lucky one. I said we knew that they could not have come all the way from Stalingrad without masses of lorries, but that we had not seen many on the way there. If they had lots of lorries available we should be delighted if they would do the evacuation—or we would go fifty-

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fifty ; in fact we would fall in with anything they desired. The matter would be referred to Moscow, they answered, and we would be informed by to-morrow evening. I told them I had been at Barth when that camp had been cleared by Fortresses. Was such a thing possible here? I asked, and again I got the same answer.

The conference now broke up in a much more friendly atmosphere than that in which it had started ; in fact I was invited to stay in the Russian quarters, but made a polite excuse and invited myself to a meal with them the next day instead. I was determined to treat the Russians as true friends and allies. Without doubt this friendly method of approach paid a good dividend.

After the conference someone led me through the darkness to Colonel Hughes' room. Here was a most excellent man, working calmly and clearly under a sea of difficulties. He had gathered the doctors and those who mattered in the camp, and with them Lee Warner and I got down to a conference. I insisted that the convoy, with all the sick it could hold, must be out of the camp by seven the next morning. We had permission for the convoy to leave, but who could tell whether the Russians might not cancel it if given the time and chance. One doctor would have to go with it and take a full report of the medical and sanitary conditions, and also a report from me to Colonel Ireland. So, leaving the doctors to work all night, we splashed our faces with a little rare and precious water and fell into wooden bunks. It had been a long day.

I wrote a report at 6 a.m. next day and sent it back with the convoy.

By our time we rose at 5.30 (the Russian time is an hour ahead of ours—triple summer-time, in fact) and found the convoy was already full of sick and maimed. There were many who had lost their limbs from frost-bite during a terrible winter march when a huge prisoner-

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of-war camp had been evacuated before the oncoming Russians. The doctors had done wonderful work during the night, and all the sick men had been dressed and made as ready for the five-hour journey as the limited medical equipment would allow.

The short supply of water and the absence of all drinkable water was one of the greatest hardships and dangers in this stinking camp, where thousands of dirty men, many of whom had lost all sense of decency and self-respect, were cooped up together. The sanitary conditions, since the water had failed, were deplorable and so inconvenient that many of the prisoners of war, to whom years of enforced idleness had made everything too much trouble, failed to use even the crude facilities which existed.

Food was also running short, though not yet desperately so. When the Russians were asked to help with food they advised the ex-prisoners of war to go into the countryside and kill what animals they needed.

At 7 a.m. punctually the convoy, led by Major Lee Warner, wheeled out of the compound and down the steep hill to the main road. It carried fifty of the more seriously sick and disabled men, as well as a doctor and four medical orderlies, and I felt a great load off my mind as Colonel Hughes and I strolled across to his mess for breakfast.

For the next couple of hours there was a confused rush of events, conferences and decisions carried out in the midst of a milling mob of aimlessly circulating ex-prisoners of war, filled with egoistical curiosity and obstructing all movement.

There were in the camp 650 U.S.A., 520 British, 2,500 Dutch and about 17,000 French, the latter living partly in the camp and partly in the neighbourhood around. With the news of the arrival of our convoy they swarmed back into the camp and lay about in the sand or walked about in every conceivable costume, from a *cache-sex* the size of a pocket handkerchief to a well-pressed uniform,



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seeking what they could pick up, either information or material objects of advantage to themselves. Old prisoners are like jackdaws—they seize upon every unconsidered trifle in case it may come in useful, and by necessity and training they are expert thieves.

There were no British officers in the camp, but Mr. Brock, regimental sergeant-major of an Airborne division, was the senior warrant officer. He was most ably supported by a warrant officer of the R.A.F. and no praise can be too high for the work these two did that day or for the excellent discipline of the British and Americans in the camp. We decided that we could act just as though lorries or aircraft would arrive shortly to evacuate the camp. This, in Colonel Hughes' opinion, was a highly optimistic view of the situation.

Mr. Brock and his orderly-room staff, I found, had been working at high pressure all night. Already nominal rolls for all the British had been got out and it was decided that the men should be formed into companies of twenty-five, each led by an N.C.O.—twenty-five being a suitable load for a three-ton lorry or a Dakota.

Leaving Jimmy Wilde and Mr. Brock to organise our special interrogation of the British ex-prisoners of war, I pushed through the mob to find Colonel Hughes. On the way I was unwillingly buttonholed by deputations from all the foreign nationalities—Dutch, Polish, French and Belgian—to whom I gave appointments in the afternoon, but could promise little, although even the hope or sight of someone else being evacuated is better than eternal stagnation.

The senior Dutch officer, a naval captain, was a most charming man, and it went to my heart that I could do so little for him, except to report the conditions in the camps and the number of Dutch at the earliest opportunity. This in fact I had already done. I found Colonel Hughes being heckled by a group of rather angry

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Russian officers. The interpreter (soon known to us all as Peter), a nice boy, but rather irritating when acting in his official capacity, kept asking why the convoy had left without Russian permission—and who had sent it off. Hughes, who did not know the facts because he had not been at my conference with the Russians the night before, was fencing with great skill and calmness; he is a natural diplomat. I butted in with the statement that last night I had received permission from the Russian colonel for the convoy to go. "General permission, perhaps," said Peter, "but the Russians were in charge of the camp and the commandant had not given the order to go."

A long and tedious argument ensued, the basic facts being (1) that the convoy had departed an hour and a half ago, and (2) that I fully believed that I was carrying out Russian instructions in sending it off. Although there was really nothing more to be said, a great deal more was said.

I had already agreed with Mr. Brock to address a full parade of the British at 9 a.m., and after a conference with Colonel Hughes it was arranged that the Americans should parade at 10 a.m. and that I should address them too. Hughes also put his orderly-room to work getting out nominal rolls and forming his men into companies as the British had done. No doubt he was also involved in numerous other problems, for he was a sorely tried man. Nevertheless, I never saw him anything but calm and sane—he was a grand fellow. We carried out all these preparations without the least expectation that the evacuation of the camp was about to take place; it was better than doing nothing and it gave an immense fillip to the morale and discipline of the camp.

As I came out of Hughes' bedroom I was stopped by a smartly-dressed Polish officer of unknown rank with a Red Cross band on his arm. He was quite unintelligible, and as I could do nothing for him I left him more abruptly

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than politely and pushed out through the mob into the compound.

Here the R.A.F. warrant officer met me with the information that all the British were on parade, formed up into companies and were awaiting my presence. Between the British and American barracks was a distance of some three hundred yards, seething with half-clothed humanity wandering aimlessly about or sleeping in the dirty sand. The day was already hot, so taking my car, the warrant officer and I drove down to the parade.

The disciplined ranks of the British were a fine sight among the general disorder of the camp. Among them was a sprinkling of Paratroopers, mostly taken in Normandy about D Day, but the greater number of men had been prisoners for four or more years. They were drawn up into companies, three abreast and eight deep, with the company leader in front of each. They came to attention with a rigidity and unison that would not have shamed the Guards drilling before Buckingham Palace. It was a magnificent show under the circumstances and I noted that it was being watched with surprise and admiration by some of the Russian officers, including Peter. Knowing nothing about the drill, I had the sense to take the salute and tell the regimental sergeant-major to give the order to "stand easy." My next order shook Brock visibly—it was "Form a hollow square." Standing in the middle I made a speech on the good hopes of evacuation in the near future—on discipline, on interrogation, and (remembering Peter) on the friendliness, co-operation and efficiency of our Allies, the Russians. I laid it on with a trowel, and, judging by Peter's beaming face, it clearly went down well.

After that was over I went to see Jimmy, and had hardly got down to work with him when Peter knocked at the door and said the commandant wished to see me. I said I was very busy, but Peter insisted that the matter was of vital importance, so I went off with him to the

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Russian quarters in the next barracks. I had some misgivings, wondering whether my sins had found me out and pondering over my "phoney" pass.

In a room, bare except for a few wooden chairs and a table, five Russian officers were sitting talking. A chair was found for me, but for a good five minutes longer they continued to talk in Russian. Then Peter said to me suddenly in English, "I am instructed to tell you that all the British and Americans will be evacuated to-day by Russian transport."

"What!" I shouted, "all in one day?" I could not believe my ears.

"Yes, one hundred Russian lorries will come to-day and take those fit to travel by lorry. The sick will be evacuated by air. You have permission to arrange for aeroplanes to be sent to fetch them."

"When will the first lorries arrive?" I asked.

"By noon, or perhaps a little later."

I stood up and solemnly bowed to each Russian in turn, and each returned the compliment. I then looked at my watch, and it was ten-thirty. There was a vast amount of work to do.

"You will please have nominal roll ready in duplicate of all the British and Americans who are to be moved."

"They are ready now," I answered, blessing last night's effort of Brock and his orderly-room. It was now the Russians' turn to be surprised. I could see they disbelieved me. "The nominal roll shall be in your hands in five minutes."

That shook them, but they had another shot in the locker.

"All the men must be formed into companies with a leader to each company," said Peter.

"That has already been done," I answered again.

They registered intense surprise. "How many in each company?" asked Peter.

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"Twenty-five."

"There must be fifteen in each company."

"Why?"

"Because that is about the number that will go into each lorry."

"Are all the lorries the same size?"

"Probably not; some may hold twenty and some as low as twelve."

"Then what is the sense of changing to companies of fifteen if in any case they will have to be broken up when we already have companies of twenty-five?"

We wrangled tediously over this, but eventually they gave way on my promise of a separate nominal roll for each lorry.

Business over, I was then invited to breakfast with the Russians. It was nearly 11 a.m.

"I shall be delighted," I said, hoping they meant lunch and not breakfast, "but when?"

"Now," said Peter.

"Give me a quarter of an hour," I begged. "There is a hell of a lot to do if the first batch of lorries are really going to turn up at noon," and fled.

Outside, Peter ran after me with one last impossible request. "The nominal rolls must have all the names translated phonetically into Russian."

"And who's to do that?"

"I will."

"Don't be absurd," I said. "There are twelve hundred men. It will take you days and the lorries will be here in two hours."

We heard no more of that suggestion.

Jumping into my P.U., which by the grace of God had not been stolen, I tore up to the American barracks, where I found the Americans gathering for parade. Colonel Hughes was thrilled when I told him the news, though he could hardly believe it. I had to force him to make the first announcement to his own men—a

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pleasure which he thoroughly deserved. I also made a short speech myself to the American parade, and praising the Russians on the off-chance that Peter might be present—and asking for the strictest discipline and co-operation to assist us in the evacuation. The parade was dismissed and the American orderly-room set to work at high pressure to get out the nominal rolls.

Immediately after the parade I was asked by the American doctor whether the aerodrome was fit for evacuation by air, and if so, whether by Forts or Daks. I had no idea of the answer, but promised to find out.

The next most pressing item on the programme was, however, breakfast with the Russians. Five Russian officers and myself walked slowly over to a small cottage just outside the compound. For them there seemed to be no need for hurry—nothing of any urgency was going to happen—it was just a lazy, hot day.

I had a thousand urgent calls on me, but a friendly lunch with the Russkies seemed to me the most important of them all, and I did my utmost to make the party “go.” At first it was pretty grim. We sat solidly round a bare table and exchanged a few interpreted remarks whilst a Russian girl, of incredible robustness, clumsily laid the table. The Russians were apt to lapse into mutterings of their own unintelligible talk till I found that the officer on my left spoke a little French and the one opposite me a little German. It was hard work till a small decanter of aperitif was put before us—then matters improved.

Some plates of radishes mixed up with raw fish in oil were placed on the table to be followed by a thin potato soup in which unattractive lumps of meat were floating. After that came some sort of goulash—vegetables and meat, accompanied by a couple of glasses of very rich milk. A couple of small apertifs was all the alcohol we had, no doubt all that was obtainable.

I did my best to keep the party bright, and finally

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succeeded. The turning point, I believe, was a short speech that I made in German and a toast I proposed in honour of Stalin. We drank this with enthusiasm and thawed visibly thereafter, to such an extent in fact that finally we exchanged our home addresses and gave promises to visit each other after the war.

After lunch I collared the adjutant, who spoke German, and told him we must inspect the aerodrome to find out what aeroplanes could land. We collected a young American airman and set out in my car. On the way down the steep road from the camp we met thirty to forty Russian transport trucks. It was two minutes to one—they were punctual almost to a minute. The adjutant self-consciously gloated over this evidence of Russian efficiency, and it is true to say that I was both surprised and delighted.

For an hour we searched for that wretched aerodrome, going round and round in small circles. My Russian had apparently no means of finding out. At long last he disappeared into a house and remained there for one precious hour when God knows what was happening up at the camp. When he emerged, he said he had spoken to a general and now knew where the aerodrome lay, but we could not visit it without a special pass from Rokossovski. Two hours wasted—so back we went to the camp.

We found thirty-four lorries drawn up in the compound and all the British standing in good order and waiting to load up. The R.A.F. warrant officer came up and said that they had been looking for us for the last hour, to give the word to embark.

“Were all the British to go first?” he asked.

“No,” I answered on the spur of the moment. “Load the first fifteen with British and the rest with Americans. After that we will think again.”

This was done in good order by the British and moderate order by the Americans. The Russians now appointed

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rather a pretty girl to take round two sheets of paper to each lorry and the senior man in each lorry occupied himself in making out nominal rolls of the contents of the lorry in duplicate. The time was now about 2.30 p.m. Swarming round the lorries all this time—excited, chattering and unintentionally obstructing to the utmost—were thousands of semi-nude foreign ex-prisoners of war who had no hope of going. They were waiting to pillage the rooms of those who departed, but at the moment armed guards were still placed over the doors.

Jimmy, who had concluded the interrogation with great success (really a great bit of work), dared not leave his room, however, for windows of the barracks had been broken at the back, and in spite of the armed guards at the doors, ex-prisoners of war were pouring into the building.

About 3 p.m. another seventy lorries turned up and the rest of the British and American crowded into these in good order and the drill of making nominal rolls was once more inaugurated.

We found it difficult to convince the Russians of our competence to organise the embarkation without their assistance and interference. I suppose that a chance lorry load of Russian troops would usually be incapable of making out their own nominal roll in duplicate without the supervision of an officer. The language difficulty, of course, complicated matters, so that from time to time a German-speaking Russian major would come and tell me excitedly that all was going wrong, that nominal rolls for each truck had not been made out according to our agreement—when in fact the rolls had been made out and handed in half an hour ago.

Too many cooks, talking too many languages and far too many ex-prisoners of war of all nationalities crowding round, made it impossible for there to be anything but confusion and delay in spite of patient discipline of the British and American troops and the good



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intentions of the Russians. Many of the troops sat in their lorries in the broiling sun for three hours without a murmur before starting on a journey which was to take them seven hours.

The convoy left at 5 p.m. and the first lorries reached Schwerin about eleven that night, and the last—those who had had trouble on the way—about 4.0 the next morning. In the midst of all this I was told that two American doctors had come through, sent, as I learnt later, by Colonel Shellhammer as a result of my letter. So leaving my car, precariously under guard of some French ex-prisoners of war, I pushed through the crowds to Hughes' room where the two doctors were earnestly taking notes and trying to understand the situation. With the senior doctor I had little patience, and regrettably was rather rude—we did not talk the same language. He wanted exact information with regard to the evacuation of the sick, and I can't blame him for wanting it.

"Have the Russians really given leave for the evacuation of the sick by air?" he asked.

"They certainly said so."

"Can we rely on it?"

"How do I know?"

"But I must have this information for my report."

"Of course, if we can get it."

"We must ask the Russians."

"Do, if you can talk German or Russian, but I don't suppose they know anyhow."

"Isn't there an interpreter?"

"Yes, but he is temporarily lost."

"Where is the aerodrome?"

"I have not the faintest idea. I have just been out with a Russian major for two hours, and we have failed to find it."

"Why not telephone to the Russian H.Q. and find out?"

"There is not a telephone in the place."

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"Can big planes land on the aerodrome when we do find it?"

"I am told it is suitable for Daks and doubtful for Fortresses."

Here the other doctor chipped in—he was a go-getter.

"Someone must go immediately to Rokossovski's H.Q. and get details and permission to land."

"Good idea! But the Russians say that Rokossovski's H.Q. is in Moscow."

"You are not being very helpful."

"I am doing my best. Come on, I'll find you an interpreter and you can dig out something for yourself. I have no time for the sick until this convoy is away."

"But I have got to go back immediately with a report," wailed the senior doctor.

The other doctor and I left him. I found George by a mere fluke, and the last time I saw the doctor, he was, with George's help, in conference with the Russians. What the doctor did after that I have no idea.

The senior doctor reached Schwerin well ahead of the convoy and reported to PWX H.Q. the time of its probable arrival. No doubt he also reported to Col. Shellhammer concerning the vagueness of the arrangements for the evacuation of the sick by air. Anyhow, I discovered later, Colonel Shellhammer instantly cancelled the air lift and next day sent in forty ambulances (probably without anyone's permission) to evacuate all the sick. He is a grand man for summing up a situation and making a quick decision.

The convoy still stood. No one seemed to have the powers to give the word to start. I pushed into the Russian's conference room and seized the Commandant by the arm. I was on intimate terms with the Russians by now and felt I could take liberties. Peter was there.

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"Tell the Commandant," I said, "that I know from the last convoy I sent off by mistake, that he is the only person allowed to dispatch convoys from this camp—so come on! Please say GO!" We all trooped outside and I really thought something was going to happen. But no. A serious hitch occurred which held us up for nearly an hour. There were two empty lorries left over, and the Russians ordained that these had got to be filled with French. The ensuing confusion and excitement amongst the French was frightful. From the thousands milling round in a semi-nude condition, two lorry loads had to be selected, had to collect their kits, and finally had to be induced to make out nominal rolls in duplicate. How it was done, or how it could have been done, I do not know, but at long last (about 5 p.m.) it was accomplished and the convoy started to move off.

Those of us who remained gave a sigh of relief, and the camp suddenly seemed to me very empty and repulsive. Colonel Hughes, as captain of the ship, had decided to remain behind with the sick. We went over and had tea with him; and suddenly a strong desire came over me to leave the camp. The go-getter doctor was believed to be hunting for Rokossovski and the aerodrome. I could do nothing for the sick, so there seemed no particular reason for me to stay. During the day I had been entrusted with numbers of letters from the various nationalities in the camp to their respective governments. I had no idea what view the Russians would take if they found I was smuggling these out. My pass, too, would not bear inspection, and on the whole, I felt it would be safer to go either with, or close behind, the convoy, which was conducted by Russian officers who knew me, and would probably answer for me.

Having done my job, I felt it unwise to tempt Providence further. It was possible that the Russians on a high level might inform the British that the evacuation was about to take place, and that the British might

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inquire through the Russians who this unauthorised representative might be who was conducting the evacuation on their behalf. As for the evacuation of the sick, my instinct told me that a few words with Colonel Shellhammer would be of more value than chasing Rokossovski H.Q. with a faked pass.

So Jimmy and I and George packed our kit and said good-bye to Colonel Hughes, and soon after 6 p.m. set off on the long drive back. The convoy (we heard) was taking the direct route to Schwerin so we imagined it must be possible to pass through the barriers to the U.S. lines at that point. This route was considerably more direct ; it avoided the broken bridge at Malchow and the awful détour we made on our incoming journey.

Till within thirty miles of the line of demarcation, we made good progress, though there was more traffic on the road than there was when we came in. Early on, we passed a lorry from the convoy which had broken down ; it was one of the two containing French ex-prisoners of war. They seemed quite happy about it when we inquired, so we passed on. The convoy made no serious attempt to keep together ; it was straggling in bits and pieces over thirty miles or more, and we only passed the leading lorries in Sternberg.

At one place we saw two huge columns of German prisoners, each consisting of perhaps ten thousand miserable, hopeless and weary individuals. They marched in threes, in good order, with smart Russian tommy-gunners at the side. The column was desperately tired—they just staggered along ; behind came a few farm carts which picked up the half dead men as they fell out.

The chief occupants of the road were very large numbers of German refugees returning eastwards to their villages. Some were walking with every sort of rucksack, pack, or push-cart, but the greater majority were driving two- or three-horse farm-carts crammed with their household belongings.

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The people, men, women and children with the carts were quite well-dressed, and although there were no smiles and little talk, they did not appear to have been ill-treated. We passed many hundreds of these carts—at one place not less than fifty of them in a slow moving convoy. At another place, scores of them were halted in a field, an untidy, caravanserai of carts, horses, women and babies. It struck me as remarkable that the supposedly “brutal” Russians left this attractive booty of goods and women untouched.

Farther on we passed a large column of singing men. These we took to be Polish or Russian liberated prisoners returning to their homes. Nearby, in a little square, was drawn in ranks some 500 men with wooden rifles. They had obviously been drilling—perhaps they were Poles, returning to join the Polish army. At one spot there was a live bomb half buried, almost in the middle of the road. Someone had taken the trouble to put in a couple of sticks to mark the spot; the traffic just went round. This seemed to us rather a casual method of dealing with an unexploded 1,000-lb. bomb—I hardly think our bomb-disposal section would have approved.

At Sternberg we passed the head of our column halted in the main square, and received a hearty cheer. I had left the camp that day partly with the object (for safety's sake) of being with the convoy. Instead of waiting, however, we pushed on—just why it is hard to say!

Firstly, I think our trip had gone so smoothly that there was no apparent danger; secondly I was very tired and felt unable to face once more the effort of talking to ex-prisoners of war or through an interpreter to the Russian officers. I also wished to report as soon as possible the probable time of arrival of the convoy and the fact that it would arrive in bits, spread over many hours; and anyhow, we were only thirty miles from the line, so why wait? Going through Brül we were stopped by the Russian police—two men in uniform and red arm bands with letters on them which looked

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like M.P. but were not. I produced my phoney pass ; they could make neither head nor tail of it. I tried English, French and German without effect, so George was introduced. He proceeded to have a long discussion, which as I understood not one word, made me feel restless and uncomfortable—he seemed to be answering a hell of a lot of questions. Finally they took my name (phonetically) and the number of the car and allowed us, rather unwillingly, to proceed.

I had on me letters from the French ex-prisoners of war and the Belgian ex-prisoners of war in Neu Brandenburg to their respective ministries in Paris and Brussels and a letter from the Poles to an unreadable address, so I definitely did not want to be searched. I did not want to take any more risks, however small ; I was very tired and wanted to go safely to my bed—in fact, I got “ the wind up ” and cursed my folly for leaving the convoy.

A few miles farther on we came to a barrier. The Russian sentry half lifted the pole which was across the road as at a level crossing, and then noticed something queer about the car and hesitated. I then made what I am sure was a first-class blunder. To speed him up I put my head out and shouted “ Anglesi,” which I fondly imagined to mean “ Englishman.” Instantly the sentry realised that a situation had arisen beyond his ken. He put the pole down firmly and came round to the door of the car. My pass was, of course, unintelligible to him, and in due course George had to be introduced again. George’s explanations apparently cut no ice, so having no option, George and I, leaving poor Jimmy rather lonely in the car, were marched off in front of a sentry to a farm house about a quarter of a mile away.

“ This ought to be interesting,” said George to me as we walked down together. “ Too interesting,” I answered.

Outside the house, about fifty Russians were seated on

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benches. In front of them was a blackboard on which a map of the world was hung. Obviously a lesson in geography was in progress. A number of the Russians on the doorstep greeted us in the most friendly manner, but an officer beckoned us to follow him down a dark passage. After rather an anxious wait of a few minutes in the passage, we were ushered into a room where a young Russian lieutenant was seated at a desk. I felt that he had a strong aversion to foreigners, but I insisted upon shaking hands with him in the cheerful mood of an ally. He showed no enthusiasm and could not talk English, French, or German. He examined my "phoney" pass, but held it upside down. Eventually a German-speaking Russian was found to whom I told my mission—my rank—my point of entry into Russian territory—my reasons for passing out at a different point—the towns I had passed through—the duration of my stay—and a large number of other facts. Finally, I gave a very free translation of my pass into German ; but the Lieutenant was not impressed, and we were escorted out of the room.

After another rather embarrassing wait in the passageway, a cheerful young officer accompanied us back to the car ; he was clearly an Anglophile (especially R.A.F.), and I began to see daylight. The barrier was lifted, but he got into our car, too. Not so good. We turned into a side road and bumped along to another farm house. Once again we waited, and were objects of much curiosity, whilst he knocked respectfully (and I thought, rather fearfully) at several doors. Suddenly a man emerged from a cottage about thirty yards away of whom I have seldom seen the like. He seemed to me to be quite six foot three inches in height and broad in proportion—a vast man. His face was clean-shaven and the colour of red mahogany, with high cheek bones and the hair en brosse.

To me he was a terrifying sight. This awful figure in the smart uniform of a Colonel, black top boots, black

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breeches, greeny coloured tunic with bright red epaulettes, advanced very slowly towards us, his face expressionless.

At ten paces away we halted and we saluted each other rigidly. The little Russian who accompanied us, saluted and said a few words to him. The giant listened, motionless and then made a sharp, quick movement of dismissal with his hand. Again he and I saluted each other with the maximum of stiffness. Apparently we were free. We never spoke a word, but I have seldom been so glad to get away from anybody, though probably this Russian officer was neither so big nor so fierce as the picture of him which remains in my memory.

The rest of the journey was without incident. Two more Russian barriers and one more American opened before us without question or without showing a pass and shortly after 10 p.m. we entered the town of Schwerin along the road between the lakes.

I must own that we all gave a great sigh of relief as we passed the barrier and rolled along the nice safe road in American Occupied Germany. Travelling in Russian territory will be pleasanter, I thought, when the Russians cease putting the wind up their friends as well as their enemies—then I remembered the faked pass, and that conscience makes cowards of us all !

After reporting the day's events to Colonel Shellhammer by telephone from Ludwigslust, we wallowed in hot baths at our billets and so to bed at 1 a.m. It had been a very long day.

Next day I went up to the 18th Corps H.Q. and had to halt in the street to allow a long convoy to pass. It proved to be the British and Americans from Neu Brandenburg who had been de-loused and re-clothed at Schwerin, and were now moving on to Luneberg.

Each lorry load as it passed gave us a rousing cheer of recognition which brought tears to my eyes ; for many of these men it was the first day of liberty after five years of hell.



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To what extent we were responsible for the evacuation of the British and American ex-prisoners of war from Neu Brandenburg, it is impossible to say. I have no doubt whatever that in principle, evacuation by Russian lorries had already been agreed to by high authorities. Whether our activities had rung a bell and put into operation a movement which might otherwise have been indefinitely delayed or whether it was a pure fluke that the lorries arrived that day after we did, I have no idea—and probably never shall have, but I like to think that we, Major Lee Warner, Jimmy Wilde, George and myself, had a hand in it.

### III

#### Neu Brandenburg Re-Visited

ON Friday, May 18th, 1945, after the Brandenburg adventure, Jimmy and I, having collected Arthur from 83 Group Main H.Q., repaired to our peaceful German billet on the northern outskirts of Luneberg.

Jimmy and I were both considerably upset internally for several days. I think we must have drunk some un-boiled water in that filthy camp. During the intervals of being sick and paying visits to the lavatory, I called on several units in the neighbourhood with the purpose of passing on the information I had learnt and finding out whether there was any expectation of further ex-prisoners of war passing through this area from the Russian lines. The rather vague information obtainable supported my own opinion that there remained no large body of ex-prisoners of war, either British or American, in the whole Russian territory north of Berlin.

Among the formations visited was PWX of 2nd Army, where I suggested that something ought to be done for

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the 20,000 or so ex-prisoners of war—French, Dutch, Belgian, Yugoslavs and Czechs—still left in Neu Brandenburg who were, as far as we knew, very short of food and medical supplies. PWX authorities took a favourable view of this, but were powerless themselves to operate in Russian territory without the official permission which was unobtainable. They thought that Major Lee Warner of the British Red Cross might be stimulated to make another unofficial entry under the ægis of the International Red Cross. But Major Lee Warner required no stimulation ; what he wanted was supplies, lorries and drivers. There was, however, a further and most peculiar complication. The British Red Cross, or at any rate the advanced section of it at Ludwigslust, had neither stores nor lorries of any consequence. They were even dependent for their own nourishment (as were also the advanced PWX party at the same place) on the generosity of an American mess. They could transport themselves and their luggage with difficulty, but for anything beyond that they were dependent on American transport, which was most freely and generously lent. Further, the British Red Cross were not authorised to deal with any but British personnel, an absurd restriction, considering that they were affiliated to the International Red Cross, on whom they were dependent for supplies. Major Lee Warner of the British Red Cross could not therefore officially take International Red Cross supplies to Allied ex-prisoners of war languishing in Neu Brandenburg, and, which is more, the International Red Cross could not do so either, and for the following reasons.

The headquarters of the International Red Cross is at Geneva, and is run by the Swiss. Now, the Swiss have never resumed diplomatic relations with Russia, so that the International Red Cross is non-operative and non-recognisable in Russian-controlled territory. Officially, therefore, however willing people on the spot might be, nothing could possibly happen. It was clear that some

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large anti-red-tape clippers would have to operate overtime if food and medical supplies were to reach Neu Brandenburg. Unofficially, PWX were keen and enthusiastic and in actual fact everyone concerned stretched a point or two with (as will be seen) excellent results. Two nights later, on May 23rd, Captain Grey's section turned up at the billet, having driven 350 miles from Holland in the day. He carried with him most surprising orders. Our headquarters at S.H.A.E.F. apparently expected a large number of British prisoners of war to pass through the north part of the line from Russian territory, and were sending interrogators hot-foot to the reception camps, Wismar, Schwerin, Ludwigslust, and to a reception camp further south which was investigated by Captain Murray and proved to be non-existent.

However, I was delighted at the prospect of returning to Ludwigslust for a bit ; quarters there were excellent, hot baths obtainable, and American hospitality magnificent. Also I was anxious to find out whether Lee Warner's International Red Cross expedition would materialise.

Fate, it seemed, was pushing me into another adventure in Russian territory. The next day, Saturday, May 26th, with my P.U. and the lorry, we moved gently up to Ludwigslust, passing Captain Murray (justifiably angry for reasons given) on his long journey back to Holland. Lee Warner had actually collected two enormous white International Red Cross lorries filled with some 2,800 American Red Cross parcels, plus medical supplies, and was awaiting Russian permission to depart. I never found out—and I don't think Lee Warner knew himself—whether he was leading a British Red Cross or an International Red Cross expedition. He had to be a little bit but not too much of both ; to the Russians he was the British Red Cross and to the British he was the International Red Cross.

The tyres of the International Red Cross lorries began

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deflating themselves in a most depressing manner as they stood in the yard. This may seem a trivial matter, but there were no spare tyres or inner tubes and practically no tools on the lorries. It took hours to change a wheel or mend a tyre on one of these huge things.

We pictured the expedition, full of supplies, being held up during the night in Russian territory, trying to get help or explain matters to uncomprehending and justifiably suspicious "Russkies." We did not fancy this prospect. Lee Warner asked me to join his expedition as interpreter, and I accepted without hesitation. Firstly, they definitely needed an interpreter. I don't speak Russian, but German is even more important, for in German one can ask the way from the natives. If in trouble with the Russians, it is always possible to find a Russian who speaks German well enough to act as interpreter. When very indifferent German on both sides is the only means of communication, a nice vague territory is left from which detailed explanations are excluded. I have never been in the Russian zone in circumstances in which too much clarity was desirable. Secondly, having suggested the expedition originally, I felt a certain responsibility and a wish to see it through. Thirdly (my official excuse), it might be possible inside the Russian zone to find out for certain whether or not there still remained large numbers of ex-prisoners of war to come through, as S.H.A.E.F. seemed to expect. The necessity for obtaining official permission from the Russians was a further cause for delay. During the afternoon an extremely smart Russian liason officer turned up. He blessed the expedition and said it might go as far as Parkim and then unload into Russian lorries, but he said he could not promise that Russian lorries would meet us nor could he give us any idea of where we could park the supplies if they did not turn up. He admitted that his proposal was unsatisfactory, but he had no power to authorise us to pass outside his own territory.

The whole of Russian occupied Germany is cut into

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zones ; once inside a zone one can circulate freely, but to pass from one zone to another requires an order from Rokossovski, who was reputed by the Russians to live in Moscow. Wherever he lived, he must have been working overtime signing passes.

This centralisation may be highly efficient under certain circumstances. Russian orders radiate rapidly down authorised routes and are obeyed to the letter. But there are no short cuts or deviations. To the dismay of the British Army, the old-school-tie method of working is entirely cut out. When one realises that in practice the efficient working of the British Army depends very largely on friendly co-operation, one can appreciate the difficulties experienced by British and Russian officers when trying to work harmoniously together. For example, let us imagine that a conference on a high level is called to decide the ways and means of exchanging ex-prisoners of war. The Russians would surely arrive with full knowledge of the subject and rigid plans prepared down to the last detail. The British would probably arrive with no plans, but ready to listen to everyone's ideas and difficulties and to effect a workable compromise. After several days of possibly futile discussion—the British suggesting minor improvements and the Russians defending their plan point by point (for even minor alterations would necessitate reference back to Moscow and thus cause indefinite delay)—the British find it easier to accept the Russian plan *in toto*. The plan having been adopted, a high-up British general, before he turns in for the night, proceeds to put through half a dozen telephone calls to various old pals in neighbouring units and arranged to borrow the necessary lorries. Two days later at the appointed hour a few thousand Russian ex-prisoners of war are deposited in Russian territory according to contract. Next day a further batch arrives, and so on, till the Russians call a halt ; they cannot put their ponderous machinery into action so quickly and simply cannot imagine how the

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British have managed it. The British now have some justification for considering the Russians inefficient. The Russian method needs time and obedience—the British method needs good will and extemporisation, but the two methods don't always work in harmony.

There seemed little prospect of official permission coming through from Moscow for a day or two, so I determined to make a quick trip down to Kerlitz, where a week before the presence of two or three hundred British and American prisoners of war had been rather vaguely reported. Kerlitz is on the road from Grabow to Berlin, and I hoped to be in and out again of Russian territory within five hours. To be on the safe side, I let Major Bernays know (unofficially) where I was going to, and he promised to do his best to fish us out of a Russian gaol if we had not turned up by 4 p.m.

Jimmy and I in the P.U. had no difficulty in passing both barriers. At the Russian barriers there is always a telephone in evidence. I believe myself that it was a fake and put there merely to impress us. It is part of the show, however, to make a pretence at telephoning before letting one through. Beyond Grabow the road is first-class and we made good progress, doing the sixty miles to Kerlitz in well under two hours, unhindered by undesirable curiosity. Along most of the road the untidy and stinking litter of battle defiled the countryside. Judging by the mess, one would think that every smashed German lorry had been half filled with paper. In some places the Russians had gone so far as to scrape some of the litter, plus innumerable helmets, gas-masks and bayonets, into heaps, but the dead horses remained untouched, polluting the air. In many places flamboyant red banners were stretched across the road. On these there were always the same two words in large white letters, the second word bearing a strong resemblance to Tolbukin (the name of the general who had been in charge of operations in Hungary). The idea that some important visitor was expected was supported by seeing

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some 5,000 horses and men collected in a large field. They were off-saddled and the horses ranged in orderly lines. On the highest point in the field a saluting point or rostrum had been erected. It was made of white wood, draped in red bunting and dominated by a huge picture of someone. Members of a brass band with their instruments were lying on the green grass waiting and playing cards. We passed many troops of cavalry on the road also moving towards the same field. The horses were mostly rough but workman-like, and the fierce, tough-looking men sat them as though born to the saddle. It was an impressive sight.

Kerlitz, although there were a good many Germans about, was fully occupied by Russian troops. In the main square there was red bunting everywhere. The Russian Army loves making decorative arches, and portraits of all the Russian leaders were to be seen in this Square. The portraits were done rather well in coloured crayon, and these pictures, usually about four feet by four feet, are quite a feature of the countryside. One frequently sees them decorating busy crossroads.

Having no inclination to hang about unnecessarily, we toured round the streets, but saw no signs of ex-prisoners of war, which we surely would have done had there been a liberated prisoner-of-war camp in the district. At last I stopped my car near a sensible-looking German. He told me that all British and Americans, as far as he knew, had been evacuated about a week ago and he advised us to confirm this with the German Burgermeister (the mayor) living a few doors down the street. This we did and retreated from Kerlitz with a very satisfactory negative result.

In a wood at the side of the road we noticed on the return journey that a number of wooden huts were in course of construction, and in an open level plot in their midst were all the appliances for a gymnastic display. The huts, the entrance arch, and in fact many of the trees, were cheerfully decked out with flags and the

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usual red bunting. We presumed that a recreation ground for the troops was being prepared. In one place, about two hundred yards from the road, a really vast explosion had taken place on the edge of the wood. For a hundred yards or more from the crater the trees were bent in perfect unison and all the bark and branches stripped off. A large electric pylon standing between us and the crater was now a mass of tangled iron. On a long stretch of lonely road I stopped and questioned three women who were walking along. They were, as I thought, Germans—three out of the many millions of displaced persons tramping the roads of Germany. The home of one of them was on the Oder, another came from Duisberg and the other from Hamm. Considering they had lost everything—homes, children, relations, property and now found themselves without food or money or a place to lay their heads—they were quite remarkably cheerful. They asked for nothing but news. “Had the peace terms been published—was it possible or advisable for them to return to their homes?” Their only baggage was a small basket; they had neither a blanket nor a coat. Poor things, I could do nothing for them but wish them luck. What an appalling avalanche of misery Hitler and his gang brought upon the German people.

In Grabow we stopped for a minute to read some notices in German which had lately been posted up on the walls. They turned out to be lists of Germans whom the Russian military authorities had appointed to be burgermeisters of various towns. Much the same thing was being done on our side of the line. We returned to our lines without further incident and slept once more in Ludwigslust. Early the next morning came the surprising news that permission had been given by the Russians for the expedition to go right through to Neu Brandenburg and that any route could be used except that via Parkim. We were also informed that no special pass would be issued to us. The absence of a *passee par*



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*tout* filled us with misgivings, because we refused to believe that the Russians had taken the trouble or had had the time to notify every control post between Ludwigslust and Neu Brandenburg that our expedition was on the way. It seemed to us that the Russian liaison officer had washed his hands of the whole affair and that we were being left to take our chance. Lee Warner, Rolin and I consequently reviewed our passes. Major Rolin, who had turned up the night before, was a Belgian parachutist, secret service, liaison-cum-welfare officer representing the Belgian section of PWX. At least that is what he said he was, and you could take your choice. He wanted to contact Belgian prisoners of war in Russian territory, particularly at Prenzlau, where many thousands were reported to be in a very poor condition. As he was a most excellent young fellow, talked English well, and was ready for any dirty work, we were delighted to have him with us. The passes he possessed were even less suitable than my pass for the purposes of conducting a Red Cross expedition, so we decided to depend entirely on Lee Warner's outfit of papers. He had, of course, a perfectly genuine identification card with photographs all correct, showing him to be a British Red Cross representative. The two big white ten-ton lorries, however, had International Red Cross in German and various other German inscriptions on them. This was not too good, more especially as the bills of lading—really impressive documents—were made out as from the International Red Cross of Geneva and typed throughout in German.

As I have already mentioned, the International Red Cross has no standing in Russian occupied territory. After spending some hours mending the tyres on the lorries and trying vainly to borrow American drivers for them, the whole expedition—officially bogus, but in truth most genuinely one of mercy—pushed off about eleven-thirty to Schwerin. The Americans, quite rightly, refused to lend us drivers, but Lee Warner found two of his own who had no experience of really heavy lorries, but were

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willing to undertake the job. To these drivers I will now take off my hat with a low bow. Their skill, cheerfulness and resistance to fatigue was superb, and much of the credit for our success must be given to them. They rapidly mastered their heavy laden elephantine machines (with ten forward and two reverse gears) and drove them at high speed for nearly three hundred miles. In the camp itself they spent their whole time mending and changing tyres under the most adverse conditions and, which is more, gave us the impression they were enjoying the adventure.

This time I did not take Jimmy with me. Lee Warner and I led in my P.U. and Rolin brought up the rear in his jeep. I think my P.U. deserves special mention. It was an Austin Ten utility van, and was given to me personally by 2nd Army in July, 1944. I signed for it, and from that moment, as far as I know, it has never been in anyone's establishment. No questions have ever been asked about it and no returns made on its behalf. It was newly painted khaki—there was not a single dent in the mudguards and all its instruments worked. It was an army car, but on its bonnet was a large red, white and blue roundel. It possessed no papers whatever ; officially it was entirely bogus and could not possibly exist.

Our lorry drivers not yet having quite mastered their job, the journey to Schwerin (within our own lines) was very slow, and it was midday before we reached the PWX liaison post at the foot of the lake. Passing the barriers represented no difficulties, and the convoy went slowly through Brüel, past Sternberg, on to the main road to Neu Brandenburg. It was a lovely warm day and we lunched peacefully by the side of the road. The countryside was looking beautiful, but it was deserted. Our convoy, clearly an object of great interest to the Russians, pushed on steadily until we reached the barrier on the far side of Grabow. This barrier was of the usual type—a weighted pole bound in red bunting.

There were a few Russian soldiers hanging about doing

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nothing in particular. Here we were halted whilst an officer was fetched, but his knowledge of our language was so limited that no explanations were possible. There is a common sign language between all Western Europeans by which with a little patience one can convey a good deal quite clearly, but our signs seem to have little meaning for the Russians and theirs are often strange to us. After a quarter of an hour of unintelligible chattering, our inefficient interpreter got into our P.U. and directed us by a circuitous route of about five miles to a point half a mile down the road behind us. Why he did not go straight back down the road it was hard to imagine. Leaving our P.U. in charge of a sentry, who most unexpectedly spoke quite good English, we went into a small villa where we were introduced to a friendly Russian captain who spoke only Russian. We wasted ten minutes or so smoking with him; then he departed and we were left with our interpreter. Ten minutes later a Russian colonel with several staff officers came in. The colonel spoke quite passable German, and having questioned us quickly and found out who we were and what we wanted, refused to speak German any more, and conducted the rest of the negotiations through the wretched interpreter. He took us to his comfortable billet, where he put through a number of telephone calls, using, I was interested to see, an American type of field telephone. Soon afterwards we took very friendly leave, and were allowed to proceed with the interpreter as our escort. He rode in the jeep with Rolin. Rolin seemed to get some amusement out of talking to him. It passed the time while they crawled behind the slow convoy.

The rest of the journey to Neu Brandenburg was uneventful. It was about 8 p.m. when we climbed up the steep road into the camp, after a long and tedious drive. At first glance we could see that the camp was relatively empty, so, after parking the lorries, Lee Warner and I went along to the Commandant's office. He did not

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seem particularly pleased to see us, and without an interpreter there was no means of speaking to him, so we sat there for half an hour, completely disregarded, while he went on with his work. At length Peter arrived. Peter, when in the presence of his Commandant or when acting in his official capacity, is extremely correct and rather stiff, but outside business hours, so to speak, he becomes a very pleasant boy of twenty. The Commandant, having heard why we had come, who we represented and what we had brought, immediately produced an obstacle to further progress. He refused to accept the food parcels and medical supplies without permission from a higher authority. All we asked, we reiterated, was to be granted leave to give him the goods for distribution and then depart. But he was adamant. He told us we could obtain the necessary permission from a high authority who lived at Stettin, and that we must go to Stettin ourselves to get it—a mere hundred and fifty kilometres there and back. We suggested a telephone call to Stettin, but for some reason this did not solve the problem; either there was no telephone connection or the Commandant was not empowered to use it. Finally it was decided that Rolin should go in his jeep, taking the Russian adjutant with him. They spent two hours on the journey there, one hour hunting for the right man, two hours in conference and two hours on the return journey. In their absence Lee Warner and I learnt a lot from the inhabitants of the camp. Of the 20,000 or more who had been there ten days before only 7,000 remained; 1,000 of the Dutch had been evacuated, leaving about 1,500 behind.

There were some 1,000 ex-prisoners of various nationalities, Belgians, Yugo-slavs, Czechs, Roumanians, Italians and Finns, the rest being French. Sufficient food and medical supplies had been sent in by the Russians, but the food was uninteresting and they said that they would be glad of a few parcels. The camp had

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become more or less a transit camp. At Prenzlau there was a camp containing mostly Belgians, who were reported to be rather short of supplies, and at Ravensbrück, about 45 kilometres distant there was a political concentration camp which vied with Belsen in horror. Next day I saw a Dutch doctor who had himself been very nearly starved to death in Buchenwald. He had lately visited Ravensbrück and he told us details about this ghastly place. In the main dormitory there were three tiers of beds placed so close to each other that there was no passage through the room. It was necessary to crawl over other beds to get to the door. The prisoners were packed three to a bed and, when the Russians arrived, it was common to find the dead and the dying in the same bed together. Nearly all had dysentery and the excreta dripped from the beds above on to those below.

In Ravensbrück much progress had been made by the Russians, though as at Belsen, many of the prisoners of war were far too reduced by starvation to have any hope of recovery. Certain medical supplies were badly needed, also food suitable for starving men.

Lee Warner determined to split up the food supplies we had brought if we could get the permission to do so, between Prenzlau and Ravensbrück. Then, at the invitation of the Commandant via Peter, we walked over to the Russian mess and there by candle light at 11 p.m. had a somewhat curious meal. Rather regretfully we had been compelled, for diplomatic reasons, to refuse an invitation by the French to dine with them—for the French can always be relied upon to produce a good meal. The room we fed in was set out like a normal restaurant with small cloth-covered tables. We were served by a sturdy Russian girl, almost pretty, because of her bright grey eyes who, when she grasped what we wanted, ran at high speed like a snipe past the tables to fetch it. First we had a vegetable soup, which wasn't bad; then rather an unattractive goulash of which I could only manage the vegetables, and lastly a large plateful

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of curdled sour milk which was in small lumps so that at first I thought it was ground rice. Eaten with about half and half of sugar it was quite edible.

We washed this down with a sweet syrupy liquid, followed by really excellent Russian tea. I have never tasted better tea ; it was of the China variety and we drank it eagerly without milk or sugar. And so to bed—in clean German hospital beds with yellow sheets and hard pillows.

Around and about the mess there were quite a large number of Russian girls. Actually about twelve of them slept in a big dormitory adjoining the room where we had dined. One passed through their room as a short cut to the back door without bothering to knock, but no one seemed in the least embarrassed. Some of the girls who fed in the mess, but did not sleep there, were nurses. One rather pretty nurse who breakfasted with us the next morning (about 11 a.m.) seemed to be a friend of Peter's, and kept on demanding chocolate—so he said. I enabled Peter to meet this demand. He thanked me nicely but laughed a lot. The lady was not as grateful as I had anticipated. Most of the girls were part of the slave labour carried off by the Germans, but not yet repatriated. They were tough, cheerful, well-fed and very robust. They were now used by the Russians as a labour gang for any sort of rough work about the camp.

In this camp it was difficult to collect the right people in the right place so that decisions could be made regarding our next moves. The Commandant alone could give final orders, but the camp was a large one and he was a busy man. It was useless finding him unless Peter was produced at the same time since the Commandant spoke only Russian. The Russian adjutant who had accompanied Rolin to Stettin had not attended the whole of the conferences there and Rolin had brought back no written permission. The Commandant was, very naturally, unwilling to risk giving any orders outside his normal charter unless he was sure he was covered by

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instructions from higher authorities. Rolin, however, in spite of the fact that he had only had two hours sleep after seventeen hours of continuous driving, was very much "all there."

He knew exactly what we might or might not do. By 10.30 we had made our plans and persuaded the Commandant to let us carry them out. We were not permitted to visit the Ravensbruck concentration camp. The Russians told us that they had partially evacuated this camp, having already sent in all the food that was needed. They also told us we might leave the contents of one of our lorries at Neu Brandenburg and the other at Prenzlau and that we might take back as many sick as our convoy could hold. It was decided that Rolin and Lee Warner should go on to Prenzlau, I myself remaining at Neu Brandenburg to organise the distribution of the parcels and the selection and preparation of the sick for embarkation later that afternoon. At Prenzlau our party got a terrific reception from 6,000 Belgian prisoners of war, but at first a very cold one from the Commandant. It took a lot of talking to convince him that he might accept the urgently needed food and medical supplies without risk to himself. Once assured of this, the Commandant became extremely friendly, and Rolin and Lee Warner had a somewhat alcoholic lunch in the Russian officer's mess. They finished up by all joining hands, whilst the Commandant poured a glass of wine over their clasped hands and then flung the glass on the floor. He pronounced Rolin and Lee Warner to be his blood brothers or drinking companions—probably the latter. The party returned to Neu Brandenburg about 4 p.m., rather the worse for wear, after a most successful and valuable expedition. In the meantime, at the suggestion of the Russians, the "confidence" men or leaders of each nationality were gathered in the Commandant's office. At the request of the Russians, I gave them a short address in French explaining that the parcels were originally presents from America and were being passed

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to them for distribution via the International and British Red Cross services. The camp leaders handled the matter remarkably quickly and allotted percentages to each nationality according to its needs, referring to me from time to time to give decisions on disputed points. The Italians and Roumanians, for instance, produced a problem—were they now enemies or friends? And what about the Finns, of whom, curiously enough there were a few in the camp? In the circumstances I felt it essential to keep to the letter of the law and ruled that only full members of the United Nations could share in the parcels. I could see that this decision pleased the Russians, though it went against my own inclination. The parcels were now moved from the lorry which had remained at Neu Brandenburg (the lorry could not have been moved anyhow for the tyres were in a state of collapse), and stacked in a room by a gang of Russian girls. From there the parcels were fetched by the various nations in accordance with their allotments and taken away, usually in commandeered German horse carts of which a large number were now attached to the camp and temporarily owned by the prisoners of war. The distribution of parcels being concluded to the satisfaction of all, I was asked by the Dutch to visit their camp about a mile away. It was also necessary to call at the hospital to see how preparations were progressing. Not only was it essential to select sick who were capable of supporting a nine hour lorry drive but also accurate nominal rolls had to be made out to satisfy the Russians who insisted upon having a receipt for each man they allowed to depart. I therefore jumped into my P.U. and, accompanied by a Dutchman, drove down to their camp. Apparently quite unknowingly I was breaking the rules for we were pursued by Peter in the camp Commandant's car, hooting furiously. However, as everyone hoots nearly all the time in Russia, we took no notice and entered the Dutch camp without special permission.



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Peter gave me a very solemn lecture. He said I seemed to make a habit of breaking rules and that the Commandant was angry. I told him to have a list of his rules posted up in English against my next visit. Peter shook his head gravely at my flippancy ; but shortly afterwards he became a boy again and begged to be allowed to learn to drive my car or at least to hoot the hooter. During the journey my Dutchman told me that there had been quite a big battle at Neu Brandenburg. The Germans had apparently placed their artillery in and around the prison camp so that it was impossible for the Russians to fire without killing their Allies. But the Russians had captured a German hospital in which there were 2,000 wounded and the Russian general had threatened to kill them all if the Germans did not move their artillery from the neighbourhood of the camp. This the Germans did and the Russians entered the prison camp without a single prisoner being hurt. After visiting the Dutch—always charming people to deal with—we went on to the hospital where we found preparations well advanced. We learnt that all the Dutch were expecting to be evacuated that day by train to Holland, a most surprising development since we had no reason to believe that the through lines to Holland were yet in working order. On our way through Russian territory, we had frequently seen lines blocked for miles by shot up and burnt out engines and railway trucks ; on the other hand we had also seen a number of engines with steam up and a few trains actually moving.

It was well after 3 p.m. when the Prenzlau expedition returned, thrilled with the wonderful reception they had had from the ex-prisoners of war and from the Russians. They were delighted to feel they had been the means of delivering food and medical stores where they were so sorely needed. Their very presence in the camp had been most valuable to morale and had raised new hope in the breasts of thousands who had felt themselves deserted.

## Neu Brandenburg Re-Visited

Man is an adaptable animal, and in a well run prison camp the inmates adjust themselves not too unhappily to the life, when there is no prospect of delivery for months or even years. But, once a camp has been liberated, an almost unbearable longing for home and all that this means supercedes all other thoughts and the strain of postponement becomes intolerable. After superhuman efforts, the tyres on the lorry left in Neu Brandenburg had now been mended, and at 4 p.m. we started loading up our sick. Then, led by Major Rolin, who seemed quite impervious to fatigue, the convoy rolled out of the gates and down the steep hill into the main road. Lee Warner and I returned in my car to say good-bye to the Commandant, to apologise once more for breaking the rules and also to hold him to his promise of issuing us from store a complete Russian outfit. Good-byes, and in fact all preliminaries to action of any sort, take a long time in Russia, and jokes, generally considered suitable to such occasions, when passed through an interpreter are apt to lose their point. We felt that the Commandant, though very friendly, was genuinely relieved to see the last of his rather disturbing guests. From the Commandant's office we went down to a cellar in the neighbouring building, each carrying a Russian voucher. Against this we received and signed for a complete outfit of Russian "tommies" clothes and boots. It is a simple, becoming and comfortable costume. The top part consists of a cotton blouse secured at the neck and sleeves by small brass buttons. The trousers are like jodpurs, lacing up below the calf. The material is the same as the blouse, but these trousers are remarkably well cut. The only snag in my opinion was that there were no pockets in either of the garments. The best that can be said of the boots is that they are comfortable and easy to get on and off. The soles are rubber and the tops are imitation leather, made of coarse linen. The only leather about them is over the foot, and that is good and flexible. At last, very proud of our new issues, we got away after a

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really affecting farewell from Peter. He is an extremely nice boy and I hope most sincerely I shall see him again one day. His home was in Stalingrad where he fought and was wounded. He had lost his parents, his relations and his home. "I am just a soldier," he told me, "I have no connections and no address other than my field address."

This time not only did we have a pass written out in Russian and signed by the Commandant but also an escort of one rather unpleasant half-witted looking soldier, as well as the interpreter from Gustrov. At the moment of departure both the escorts were missing. I was only too anxious to go without them, but Peter, once more the Soviet soldier, was adamant. I pretended to be angry at the delay.

"Please don't be angry with me," he said, "I am so young and you are so old!"

At last the soldier turned up at the run carrying two black loaves and the interpreter climbed in just as I was getting really angry. After a drive of an hour and a half, we overtook the convoy halted at the side of the road, and after a quick meal of American Red Cross rations, made good progress to Gustrov, where we dropped the interpreter. The journey went well till we came to Bruel, a village some thirty miles from the line of demarcation. I was rather unwilling to go through Bruel again because it was here that Jimmy and I had been stopped by the police on our previous trip, but there seemed no way of avoiding the place without making a long detour and in any case we had a perfectly genuine pass written out in Russian.

The incident which I am now about to describe must not be considered as any reflection either on the efficiency or the friendliness of the Russians. The trouble occurred merely because one rather drunk man over-estimated the importance of his responsibilities.

It was an incident of minor importance and, but for the sick men, it would have been for us merely an amusing episode.

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Lee Warner and I, thinking it was desirable to push ahead and make preparations for the reception of our sick men at Schwerin, were several miles ahead of the rest of the convoy when we entered Bruel. The village street was sordid and narrow and the road was of the worst type of *mauvais pavé*. Half way through the village our road turned at right angles to the left and it was at this corner that the police post was stationed. I saw some Russians sitting on a doorstep opposite the corner, and a man, with a red flag in one hand and a yellow one in the other, waved us on. There were several German civilians about the place. Without looking too closely at the Russians, I took the corner quickly and trod gently but progressively on the gas. After we had gone about fifty yards I heard whistles and cat-calls and surmised that they might be directed at us. The noises were followed a few seconds later by a couple of shots fired most probably into the air. If Lee Warner and I had been on our own, we should have most certainly continued round the next corner thirty yards ahead, for inter-communication by telephone between posts is not the Russian's strong point—but there was the convoy behind us, and anyway we had our Russian pass. Several Germans were gesticulating and signing us to stop. What an obedient animal the German is—they support law and order under all circumstances, but I must say their efforts to butt in at this particular moment irritated me.

We stopped, therefore, and backed slowly down the street. A tough looking Russian police sergeant came up to the door and said something that sounded like "pospectus." I took out my note-book and showed him the Russian pass. He was obviously slightly drunk and indicated that I was to hand over my note-case too. When I quite firmly refused, it seemed for a moment that he was going to use violence, for he grabbed at it but failed to snatch it. I buttoned the note-case up in my pocket again. At that moment a young Jew of about

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seventeen came up to us. He was dressed in a non-descript uniform and spoke with equal fluency in either German or Russian. He was an intolerable youth and Lee Warner very soon hated the sight of him. He kept up a continuous burble in one language or the other. However, he was useful and henceforth acted as interpreter. It is quite beyond me to give a chronological account of the confused happenings during the next half hour. The Russian sergeant, who was obviously in complete control of this police post, ran about like a mad dog, clutching my pass in his hand. From time to time the young Jew tried to read the pass to him, and then came to me and explained that the sergeant was trying to do his duty but was drunk, so I must not mind. I did mind a lot and said so to everyone in all the languages I knew. Cars came by frequently, some were stopped and queued up behind my car at the side of the road. A few cars with Russian officers in them stopped of their own accord to watch the fun. One Russian officer gave the sergeant what appeared to be a hell of a dressing down whilst the sergeant stood somewhat rockily to attention, gripping my pass. I thought and hoped this must have some effect, but it did not. The confusion got worse. Then the convoy turned up—completely blocking the street for about a quarter of a mile. It took nearly half an hour and much shouting to sort out this jam and park the convoy at the side of the road. I tried approaching Russian officers, but without effect; they had no wish to get involved. About thirty Germans collected and watched the confusion among their enemies with smirks of amusement. I lost my temper and shouted, too—without effect. The sergeant, out of spite, made me shift my car from one side of the road to the other for no apparent reason. We tried to point out to everyone who would listen that we had seventy sick men in the Red Cross lorries, who must be taken to hospital quickly, but that cut no ice. Just when things looked pretty hopeless, a gang consisting of all the Russian

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soldiers, surrounded the sergeant and hustled him into a nearby pub. A Russian sentry then rushed up to us and by gesture, implored us to get away quickly whilst the sergeant was out of sight. But the sergeant had still got my pass and I, being bloody-minded by now, refused to move without it. The sentry threw up his hands in despair. A moment later the sergeant broke out of the pub and ran round in circles shouting at everybody. Suddenly he appeared to come to a decision. He indicated that I was to get into my car and then got in himself. Lee Warner climbed in at the back, and much to Lee Warner's disgust, so did the Jew boy. Through the Jew, I informed the sergeant that we took a very poor view of him and intended to see that he was shot for interfering with the duties of very high Allied officers—Lee Warner and myself. He was sobering a bit by now and the information shook him considerably. He proceeded to paw me with his dirty hands and hooted the hooter for me when we came to what he considered to be dangerous spots. I nearly spat on him with rage.

We drove back to Sternberg eight miles along the road we had come and halted outside a Russian H.Q. in the main street. Here everything went in the normal way to which Lee Warner and I were by now quite accustomed. We were ushered into one of the rather formal living rooms usually found in German middle-class private houses. Round the walls were cheap prints, Hitlerian texts, frightful ancestral photographs, and solid imitation neo-Victorian furniture.

Here we were cross examined quickly and sensibly, with the Jew acting as interpreter, by a young Russian officer. In five minutes he had got the hang of things, offered us cigarettes and handed us back our pass. I tried my best to leave the sergeant behind but was forced to take him back to Bruehl. On the way back he tried appeasement, but we were not prepared to play. Our interpreter chattered unceasingly till, at Lee Warner's urgent request, I told him to shut his mouth (*halts mund*).

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At the last moment the sergeant made a final effort to shake hands with us, but we indignantly refused. On our return I took the trouble to send in a report about that sergeant through the Russian liaison mission.

It is about a two-hour run to the PWX liaison post south of Schwerin. Lee Warner and I again went on ahead, and passing the barrier without any difficulty, most luckily found the PWX Colonel in charge had not yet gone to bed, though it was close on midnight. The Colonel certainly did his best under trying circumstances, but the arrival at the barrier, unannounced, of seventy sick Frenchmen was certainly not "according to Cocker"; nor were instructions on such an eventuality included in the elaborate document which guides PWX's activities. After half an hour's telephoning we were given the address of a hospital which might be able to accept our cargo, but for some extraordinary reason it was impossible to warn the hospital that we were coming.

However, by this time Lee Warner and I had got our second wind, and Rolin was inexhaustible. On we went and after a mile or two, parked our lorries in the main square of Schwerin whilst Rolin and Lee Warner set off in the jeep to find Hindenburg Strasse. This was not as easy to find as one might imagine. The place was practically deserted. A curfew order, meticulously obeyed by the Germans, ensured that all those likely to prove helpful were behind closed doors. The few "tommies" and Americans we met had never heard of Hindenburg Strasse nor of Hindenburg for that matter. Eventually the jeep returned with the news that the hospital in question was run by the Germans. It had only been open two days and was totally unprepared to receive seventy sick, but would do its best.

About 1.30 a.m. we pulled up the convoy in a small side street and slowly decanted our weary but marvellously courageous men from the lorries into a dark doorway above which hung a huge Red Cross flag.

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Inside there was indescribable confusion. Most of the lights were fused and as there were no candles, the wounded lay about in dim heaps on the floor and up the stairs, obstructing all movement. No one seemed to be in charge. Lee Warner and I, after seeing most of the wounded out of the lorries, pushed into the fray. I collared a stupid-looking German hospital orderly, who was standing idle and helpless, and told him savagely to fetch the doctor in charge. But the doctor had gone to bed and no one knew where he slept. Lee Warner, taking a torch with him, went off to find out for himself what accommodation there was. Suddenly I caught sight of a pretty German night nurse. She came quickly along the passage, trying hard to direct the sick men to what empty beds there were. A babel of voices rose round her, for she spoke only German and the sick men were all French. Almost overwhelmed, she leant against the wall with her hand to her head. I established myself as her interpreter and for half an hour, shouted orders under her directions, in two languages; for she alone seemed to know anything about the hospital facilities. The miserable German orderlies stood about and gaped. I cursed them, and even shook them, in an attempt to stimulate them into some sort of activity—above all I threatened them with death if they did not find the doctor who was supposed to be in charge. Meanwhile Lee Warner was doing wonderful work finding empty beds and putting our sick men into them.

Very slowly, as disorder was reduced, it became possible to get some idea of the number of men who still needed beds and to hunt for spare beds and mattresses in dark rooms with our torches. These Frenchmen were really wonderful. Not a complaint was heard over this frightful reception. They showed patience to the limit of endurance. In times of chaos the French character is at its best. It is then that the Frenchman becomes a thoughtful, co-operative individual of above normal intelligence—“*Système D*” they called it—“D” I



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believe, standing for "*debrouillez vous*" (i.e. get out of the mess as best you can).

At last only eight men were left, but these were some of the more serious cases who had been parked in a dark corner and overlooked. There were no more beds and no more mattresses. The French Colonel was ill, but not one of the worst. I explained the situation to him quickly and he grasped both the problem and the correct answer in a flash. Without hesitation he entered the first ward and made a flamboyant but nevertheless touching little speech demanding volunteers, among those who were less ill, to get out of their beds and make room for those whose need was greater. Immediately a dozen men, weary though they must have been, gave up their beds—most heroically, it seemed to me. Mattresses would have to do for the volunteers, but the little German nurse insisted that there were no more mattresses in the hospital. At that moment a man came up to me and said he knew where mattresses could be found in the town. He was a smart, intelligent-looking fellow, dressed in a sort of chauffeur's uniform—dark puttees, knee breeches and a black leather coat. He spoke in German. "Come on," said I, and we rushed out into the street to my car. On the way there he told me he was a Catholic priest and had been a prisoner for five years. He was a Frenchman from Alsace, so we switched over gratefully to the French tongue. We stopped outside a large building from which, as though by magic, mattresses appeared hauled by strange men. Who they were and why they delivered mattresses to us at 3 a.m. I have no idea. The whole train of events was at the same time as natural as a wild dream which when remembered in the morning seems but a swarm of disconnected improbabilities.

They piled mattresses on, in, and around my little car so that I could hardly see to drive and we returned triumphantly.

Lee Warner had got the interior organisation of the

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hospital well in hand and rapidly disposed of the remaining sick cases and the mattresses. He did wonderful work that hectic night.

In the entrance hall a tall man in German uniform came up to me and stood stiffly to attention.

"I am the doctor in charge of the hospital," he said in the precise clipped way the Germans use when reporting to a superior officer. I am not very fluent in German, but cursing is my strong suit. I drew a deep breath and let him have all I knew or could invent on the spur of the moment. He stood to attention and answered not a single word. When I had dried up, he made no attempt to defend himself. He asked me a number of questions quickly and shortly: How long we had been on the journey?; were there any infectious cases?; how ill were they? etc. He then asked permission to get on with his work, saluted and turned on his heel. I watched him go with a certain feeling of admiration. They learn at any rate in the German army how to take a "dressing down" with dignity. Lee Warner and I, knowing that a responsible doctor was now in charge, felt we could do no more; we got into my P.U. and drove rapidly back to Ludwigslust, ten miles to the south. Curiously enough, neither of us felt very tired—nor were we tired next day, the truth being that in spite of our combined ages (which amounted to 114 years!) we had both enjoyed every minute of the whole adventure.

Next day, at Lee Warner's request, I took about a hundred Cross Red parcels up to the hospital and carried out an unofficial inspection of the place, entering the wards with the doctor and nurses and questioning the men on food and conditions. Luckily, the authorised inspector, whoever he might be, did not turn up whilst this was in progress. The German doctor made a full apology and explanation for his absence the night before. This I graciously accepted, and thereupon presented him personally with the parcels I had brought to be issued entirely at his discretion.



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Lee Warner, when I told him later, fully approved, but I should be interested to learn the reactions of the medical authorities to all these irregular happenings.

Then, having congratulated and rewarded the little German nurse, who had done so excellently the night before, I set out south for Luneberg and our billet there.